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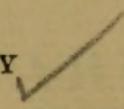
WITH

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS.

N^o. 57.

VOL. II.

THE
GOSPELS;
WITH
MORAL REFLECTIONS
ON EACH VERSE.

BY 
PASQUIER QUESNEL.

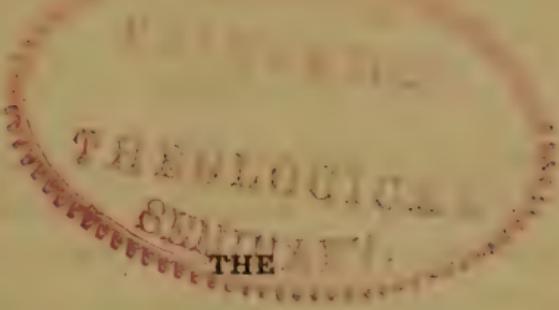
WITH
AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,
BY THE
REV. DANIEL WILSON, A. M.
VICAR OF ISLINGTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.

CHAPTER I.

SECT. I.—*The Preaching of St. John.*

“ 1. THE beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God ;”

The law of Jesus Christ alone is called *gospel*, that is to say, good news ; because therein the incarnation of the Son of God, the birth of the expected Saviour, the remission of sins, the kingdom of charity, and the enjoyment of things eternal, are declared to us. What better news could we possibly expect ? How hard soever some of the truths of the gospel may appear to us, yet that is always good news which it tells us, because it is the way of Christ, and the means of salvation. It is the part of a pious man, at his first entrance on the gospel, to form an act of faith, extending to all the speculative and practical truths contained in it, and to beg of God the grace to read them with the same spirit with which they were written.

“ 2. As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger* before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” [**Fr. Angel.*]

St. John is the messenger or angel of God, his ambassador, apostle, and herald. Every one ought to have a visible angel to prepare the way for Jesus Christ in his heart by repentance. It is this alone which receives him; it is by this that we must go forth to meet him.

“ 3. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

A preacher should, if possible, be nothing but a voice, which should be always heard and never seen. To cry, is to preach with such force as is worthy of the truth, without falling the voice through complaisance. To this end, he must not be a man of the world, but one who comes, as it were, out of the wilderness, without relations, without friends, without secular engagements, which may thwart and obstruct his ministry. The first man who appears in the gospel is one entirely dedicated to repentance: the first example and the first precept are an example and a precept of repentance—so necessary is this to salvation !

“ 4. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”

A preacher, after St. John’s example, must be sure not to quit the love of retirement and mortification, on pretence of undertaking the burden of preaching, and of other employments. The principal function and most usual business of a preacher, is to preach repentance, and to prepare souls for it.

This is a baptism which is to begin with the casting off of sin, and the renouncing our evil inclinations; but it must not stop there. To enter into the water, is to enter upon the practice of works of atonement, such as are mortifying, and capable of allaying the heat of concupiscence, and of purifying our hearts from dead works.

“ 5. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.”

The first step toward conversion, is to seek an enlightened guide. The second is, to open our hearts to him, by acquainting him with our manner of life. The third, to receive directions concerning repentance from him. The fourth, to baptize ourselves, as it were, by his advice, in tears and works of mortification. It is an instinct, and a duty which is, as it were, natural, for a man to confess his sins, and to humble himself for them, when once he is touched with a true contrition; but to do this, is not at all natural to human pride. Repentance is a pool, or rather a river, which carries our impurities far from us, so as never to be resumed again. Lord, thou art the only person who canst put us into it!

“ 6. And John was clothed with camel’s hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey;”

The fifth step toward conversion is, to observe a meanness, or at least modesty and humility, in our dress. The sixth is, to mortify the flesh. The seventh, to cut off all occasions of sin. The eighth, to employ ourselves in good works. The ninth, to

avoid all niceness and superfluity in eating. And the tenth, to edify others by a good example.—In times of greatest corruption, God generally gives extraordinary examples of mortification to awaken sinners, and confound the slothfulness of sensual men. Every one in his way, and according to his capacity, should profit by such examples.

“ 7. And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.”

It is one of the chief endeavours of an humble preacher, to raise himself out of the minds of men, and to imprint Jesus Christ therein. Humility is the sister of true repentance; they are inseparable, and mutually assist each other. To a real penitent, a truly humble person, nothing is more insupportable than to be esteemed. It is one of the pious artifices of such a person, to apply the minds of men to some excellent subject, to the end that they may not take notice of himself. This is to be a gainer in all respects himself, and to make others so, to fix their minds intently on Christ.

“ 8. I indeed have baptized you with water; but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.”

The Spirit of God is a torrent which carries off all filthiness from the heart, and a fire, which, inflaming it with his love, consumes all the impurities thereof. Jesus Christ alone possesses this Spirit entirely, merits it for us, and gives it to us. This water denotes the external works of repentance, of which Christ’s grace and Spirit is the soul; and it is this Spirit which gives life, worth, and merit to those works. Grant, O Jesus, that the Spirit with

which thou hast baptized me may awake, and remain continually in me, and that it may animate all the actions of my life.

SECT. II.—*The Baptism and Temptation of Christ.*

“ 9. ¶ And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.”

Christ does not oblige John to come to Nazareth to administer his baptism to him; but he goes out of one province into another to find him, even to the place of his mission. He condemns beforehand the slothfulness of Christians, and the abuse which they make of domestic chapels, by sparing themselves the pains of going to the service and sacraments at the parish church, under pretence of distance or inconvenience. Ought any one to be ashamed to appear a sinner, and to take in the sight of the world the remedy, after that Christ has done the same, though he had no manner of occasion for it?

“ 10. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him: 11. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

He who is renewed by baptism lives already in heaven, as being a citizen thereof by hope, which deceives him not; because charity is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given him, and because Jesus Christ dwells in him by faith, to which he is obedient in hearing the word of God. Alas! where can we find those who, since their baptism, have not shut heaven again by their sins, on whom

the Spirit of divine adoption has continually remained, who have lived like children of God, and answered the love which he has manifested towards them?— Philip. iii. 20. Rom. v. 5. Eph. iii. 17. Rom. i. 5.

“ 12. ¶ And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. 13. And he was there in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts: and the angels ministered unto him.”

Jesus, the victim of God, was prefigured by the goat of the legal expiation. Being loaded with the sins of the people in his baptism, he is driven into the wilderness, and exposed to the wild beasts, the Jews and Gentiles, to be torn and devoured by them in his Passion. So profound a humiliation preaches to us a profound humility. When any man is tempted, either in retirement or in the world, he has need of a visible angel to minister unto him and direct him. We are never without temptation in this life: when, by means of abstinence, we have overcome that of the flesh, the devil causes new ones to spring up even out this very victory. It is happy for us to be driven, with some kind of violence, into solitude by the Spirit of God, that we may avoid the temptation of the world; provided this Spirit accompany us, to fight in us, and to support us there: for solitude, as well as the world, has its peculiar temptations.

SECT. III.—*The Preaching of Christ. The Calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.*

“ 14. Now, after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15. And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

The whole gospel is here reduced to repentance. Christ joins it to the hope of heaven, as being the only means of arriving there. Here are four points of the Son of God's preaching :—1. That his Father does every thing according to the order of his adorable designs, in the time prefixed by his eternal predestination, and in the manner described in the Scriptures, prefigured in the shadows of the law, foretold by the prophets, and included in the promises, the time whereof is now fulfilled at his coming. 2. That sin has reigned under the law, that God is to reign under grace and by it, and that the time of this kingdom of grace and mercy is at hand. 3. That the kingdom of God, and his reign by grace, begins with repentance for past sins. 4. That it is established by submission to the yoke of faith, and of the precepts of the gospel, and by the hope and love of eternal enjoyments which it reveals and promises.

“ 16. ¶ Now, as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: (for they were fishers.)”

This temporary notice which Christ takes of these men, is but a consequence of that eternal notice whereby God had predestinated them to the ministry, as well as to the belief of the gospel. This is an opportunity which chance seems to present, but which was regulated in the order of God's decrees. How different are the views of Christ in the choice of the ministers of his kingdom, from those of earthly princes ! It plainly appears that he himself is to do every thing therein, since he makes choice of such ministers.

“ 17. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after

me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. 18. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. 19. And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets."

A necessary, quiet, and innocent employment, attracts the eyes of God. To know what he requires of us is a beginning of grace. He does not promise a state of inactivity to those whom he calls; but the changing their mean, uncertain, and temporal labour, into an employment heavenly and profitable, and which shall be crowned with an eternal reward. Christ here shows, that the kingdom of God by grace begins in making himself obeyed without delay, without resistance, without the allurement of any sensible good, and even without being known. It is a great happiness to have but few things to leave. Great possessions are generally great obstacles to salvation, or at least to perfection.

" 20. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him."

It is a very great matter to be obedient and faithful to the first word which God speaks to us. It is most commonly the seed of abundance of graces. Let us admire this sudden progress of the kingdom of grace, which breaks the strongest ties of nature, separating even children from their father. The first instance of self-denial which Christ gives his ministers, in the calling of Peter and Andrew, is the forsaking all secular hopes and expectations, denoted here by nets; the second is the renouncing, like

James and John, all sensual affection towards their kindred. A man finds no difficulty in following Jesus Christ every where, when he sits loose to every thing besides.

SECT. IV.—*Christ's Power over Devils.*

“ 21. And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath-day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.”

The teacher of humility begins his mission at a town where pride chiefly reigned. Preference is due from ministers to the greatest need, not to the greatest inclination. A minister should always begin by instructing, in imitation of God who leads men, not by a blind instinct, but by instruction and knowledge, by the external light of his word, and the internal light of his grace.

“ 22. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.”

The word of Jesus Christ is full of a holy freedom, energy, and wisdom, and very remote from the flattery of the world. The freedom and sincerity of a preacher gain the hearts of the faithful; because these qualifications make it evident that he adheres to God alone, and seeks nothing but him. These things are admired because they are rare; but they persuade, only because God gives his Spirit to those who belong to him, and not to the world. How great is the difference betwixt a disclaimer, whose sole end is to please, and who trusts to his own eloquence, and a man of God, who labours to convert sinners, and entirely relies upon the divine assistance !

“ 23. ¶ And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit ; and he cried out, 24. Saying, Let us alone ; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth ? art thou come to destroy us ? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.”

The devil is not at all alarmed at the human endeavours of a worldly preacher ; but he dreads every thing from a faithful minister who has the Spirit of God. The devil places his whole joy in possessing a soul with uncleanness. The lascivious cannot bear being spoken to, to repent and renounce their pleasures. Holiness has such a prevailing power, that it forces even those who are at the greatest distance from it to bear witness unto it. It makes even the devil himself sensible of it. God requires the voluntary testimony of a lively and sincere faith, like that of St. Peter ; not a forced and flattering confession, like this of the devil.

“ 25. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.”

The devil, and the world, which follows his spirit, never praise but in order to seduce. It is a necessary part of prudence not to lay ourselves open to their commendations. The way to avoid their snares, is to have no more commerce with the world than what is absolutely necessary ; and to use a holy severity towards it, which may oblige it to hold its peace. The sinner must be urged to leave off his sinful habits, without listening to its flatteries.

“ 26. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.”

What violence, what convulsions does a man feel, when he is about to relinquish a habit of uncleanness,

under which he has continued a long while ! Happy is that person, who knows at least how to renounce it betimes. When the temptations of the flesh are most violent in one who resolves to serve God, they are sometimes the last efforts of the devil, and the signs of the approaching deliverance of that soul. It is then that a man ought to redouble his prayer, to cry to God with all the strength of faith, and invoke his deliverer with the greater earnestness.

“ 27. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this ? what new doctrine is this ? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.”

The holiness of a preacher goes a great way in recovering others from uncleanness. Every doctrine which seems new, has not for that reason the fault of profane novelty. Wo to those pastors who are the cause that the most pure maxims of the gospel pass for novelties, by their having corrupted the taste of Christians, either in accustoming them to remissness, or leaving them in ignorance. The spirit of repentance inspired into great sinners, and the conversion of the most obdurate, are the true commendation of a preacher. Such preachers as are fond of the world, have reason to fear their being subjected to the spirit of uncleanness which reigns therein, whilst those who have the Spirit of God, drive this spirit of the devil out of souls, and become masters over it.

“ 28. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.”

A great reputation could not possibly hurt the Son of God; but it is a snare very dangerous for a

preacher. There are few who fear it as they ought, fewer yet who shun and avoid it, but many whom it entices and insensibly corrupts.

SECT. V.—*St. Peter's Mother-in-law. The Diseased healed.*

“ 29. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.”

Jesus here teaches his ministers to avoid applause. He does not choose the house of some great person to repose and refresh himself in: the cottage of a poor fisherman is more grateful to him than a palace. What a large field of reflection is there here for those who never think any thing good enough for them, who never meet with conveniences enough !

“ 30. But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick of a fever; and anon they tell him of her.”

Men ought to procure for the sick that assistance which they cannot give them themselves, and at least to pray for them. Jesus knew that there was somebody in this poor house who needed his help, which was a sufficient motive to draw him hither. The house of Peter and Andrew is the apostolic church, where all are tormented with the fever of sin, or suffer the assaults of concupiscence. This is the only house wherein prayers are successfully offered up for sinners, and where Jesus Christ heals them. Let us unalterably fix there. Christ sometimes waits for our prayers, on purpose to make way for that charity which prays to him, to teach us not to be too forward of ourselves in doing remarkable actions.

“ 31. And he came and took her by the hand, and

lifted her up ; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them."

Happy that soul which the heavenly Physician comes to seek, which he touches with his grace, which he recovers from its weakness, its sloth, and all its evil habits ! The acknowledgment which he requires from it, is to serve him. Good works, and, above all, those of gratitude towards God, and of charity towards the poor, ought to follow the cure of our souls. Concupiscence is the fever of the soul ; charity is its health, and this is never idle.

" 32. ¶ And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. 33. And all the city was gathered together at the door. 34. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils ; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him."

Let us admire, adore, and imitate the extent of Christ's charity. The physicians of the soul ought never to refuse any labour which presents itself, nor accept the reward of vain applause. It is into the house of truth, charity, and unity, represented by this of St. Peter, that all sinners must be conducted. This house only has the Holy Ghost, the power over the evil spirit, and the true remedies for sin.

SECT. VI.—*The Retirement, Prayer, and Preaching of Christ.*

" 35. And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

It is good for a man sometimes to withdraw him-

self from business or labour, in order to converse with God alone. Prayer is so necessary to him who preaches and labours in the church, that far from dispensing with himself on this account, he ought to take a time for it out of that which belongs to rest and the other necessities of life, rather than be deficient therein.

“ 36. And Simon, and they that were with him, followed after him. 37. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee.”

A minister of Jesus Christ ought to follow him as well in his retirement and prayer, as in his public life, when he diffuses his benefits and favours with lustre and figure. A preacher who has parts, finds but too many who come to tell him, that all men seek, esteem, and applaud him: but the more they seek him, the more ought he to fly from them, as much as his ministry will permit. There are very few of this profession who do not answer the offers and caresses of the world; and it is well if they do not anticipate and court them.

“ 38. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. 39. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.”

A preacher, who is too much cried up and followed in the city, will imitate Christ, if he withdraw himself from the crowd, and go to instruct the poor in the country: Jesus came for their sake. Men are too apt to imagine, that they have received their talents more for the sake of the rich than of the poor. They take it as an honour to preach in a village or

an hospital, in order to make their court to some person of quality; but they are not very forward to go thither for the sake of the poor themselves, and to preach to them in a manner suited to their capacity. Men should, as it were, purchase and merit the grace to be serviceable in cities, and to the great, by leaving both now and then, and going to instruct the poor in the country without noise, lustre, ostentation, or interest.

SECT. VII.—*The Leper.*

“ 40. ¶ And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

How loathsome and inveterate soever the leprosy of our sins may be, let us not be ashamed to go to Christ. Prayer, humiliation, and faith in him, as the source of all righteousness, are a triple band which ties up the justice of God, and draws down his mercy. There is nothing better than frequently to make this prayer; and to be always disposed in heart to do it, since there is always in us something which needs a cure.

“ 41. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.”

Let us here learn, that the cure of our souls is the pure effect of the goodness and free mercy of God; that Jesus Christ performs it by a sovereign authority; (“put forth his hand”) that his sacred humanity is the instrument of the divine operation in our hearts; and that it is by his will that his merits are applied to us. Fear, for he does not put forth his healing

hand and touch all: hope, for he very frequently puts it forth and touches the most miserable.

“ 42. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.”

God does whatever he pleases in the cure of the soul, as well as in that of the body; and the latter is an emblem of the former. When will it be, O Lord, that the leprosy of my pride shall disappear from before thy eyes? Hasten, if it please thee, that moment of thy mercy towards my heart.

“ 43. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; 44. And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”

Happy those who are in a condition to serve the church like angels, hiding themselves as much as possible. Whatever privileges a man has as to ecclesiastical functions, he must freely forget them, to give place to the ordinary power of the church. To follow the hierarchical order prescribed and established in the church, is to follow the order and appointment of God; and it is the mark of a regular spirit full of faith, to submit to this order, without regard to the manners and defects of the ministers. Whenever we receive any benefit from God, he must also receive somewhat in his turn from us, either by the hand of his ministers, or by that of the poor.

“ 45. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.”

An excess of gratitude is a very pardonable fault. Whoever loves his own salvation ought to take as much care to preserve humility, as to exercise charity. God grant to his church many of those evangelical labourers, who may out of modesty decline their own reputation, and be obliged by the esteem of men to conceal themselves. A pastor or minister of the church ought always to be found, when there is a real need of him; but when nothing but praise and commendation is to be received, he ought to be invisible. The more he withdraws himself from the world, the more the world values him, and puts the greater confidence in him.

CHAPTER II.

SECT. I.—*The Paralytic.*

“1. AND again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. 2. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.”

The retirement of a preacher advances his reputation, and renders his labours more beneficial to those souls who seek him. This wonderful ardour and forwardness of the Jews to hear the word of God, condemns the lukewarmness of abundance of Christians. Men seldom hearken to it as to the word of God, which it really is, because it is seldom preached to them in such a manner as is proper to make them believe that it is so. The faith of the preacher, and

that of the hearer, ought mutually to support each other.

“ 3. ¶ And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.”

God willingly accepts the desires, prayers, and good works, which are offered for the conversion of sinners, who are not themselves sensible of their misery. Here is a representation of the universal charity of the church, which is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, which bears sinners in her bosom, and presents them continually to God by Jesus Christ. Every particular Christian ought to imitate the charity of the church, to be zealous for the conversion of sinners, and to bring them to Christ by prayer, good advice, good example, and by patience and mildness in supporting them. We are more culpable than we imagine, when we are deficient in point of charity, in neglecting to pray for those whom providence has made known to us, in not admonishing them of their faults, and in misguiding them, or treating them after a harsh and severe manner.

“ 4. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.”

That is a holy and necessary violence which a man uses in order to approach Christ. Adorable judgment! He presents himself to some, and they reject him: others earnestly seek him, and scarce can they get near him, even by extraordinary means. Happy that person, for whom pious souls use so many charitable endeavours, that he is at last brought nigh to Christ. It is absolutely necessary to come nigh unto

him some way or other, either by the door, or by the roof. Nothing should be able to hinder a man from doing it, because without him he is utterly lost.

“5. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

God often defers to hear the prayers which are put up for the bodily health of a friend or relation, and gives that of the soul which was not asked for them. Sin is the source of all the infirmities of the body; it is the wound to which a remedy must be applied in the first place. God rewards the faith which makes us mindful of our neighbour, though it be not very clearly enlightened: and he rectifies it, by showing us, by the order of his gifts, that which ought to be asked first. Christ calls this sick man “son,” to make us comprehend, 1. That God is never more truly our Father, than when he confers spiritual graces upon us. 2. That the physicians of the soul are fathers, and ought to have the heart and conduct of such.

“6. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, 7. Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?”

The generality of mankind are more inclined to take an occasion of offence at their neighbour, than to be edified by the extraordinary virtues which he possesses, or the truths which he delivers. Divine truths serve only to set us at a greater distance from truth itself, when we do not receive them into an upright and sincere heart. From a principle, whence they ought to conclude that Jesus Christ is God, they conclude that he is a blasphemer. So true is

it, that one cannot have a perfect knowledge in the business of salvation without being a good man.

“ 8. And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?”

A true pastoral charity bears with the weak and even the wicked, is not discouraged at the defects of the one, or the malice of the other, applies itself to their cure, and reprehends, with a spirit of meekness, even those who sin out of envy. Admirable condescension, to bestow a new miracle on those whom so many others had only blinded ! But dreadful judgment, if it serve only to blind them the more, instead of forcing them to confess, that since he knows the thoughts of the heart, he is God, and not a blasphemer. Inconceivable delusion of the sinner ! to hide himself from man when he commits a sin, and not to fear the eyes of him who sees the very secrets of the heart !

“ 9. Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee? or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?”

Nothing is more or less easy to him who can equally do all things; but by visible miracles he makes known those which are invisible. O indefatigable goodness of our Saviour ! He works miracles upon miracles, to overcome the incredulity of his enemies: and yet pastors will not vouchsafe to clear the doubts of a soul full of faith, nor to support the weakness of a scrupulous conscience. The sole consolation of sinners is, that Jesus Christ can forgive their sins; and it is to assure them of this

consolation, that he establishes, by all sorts of ways, this fundamental truth.

“ 10. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)”

If Jesus Christ in his mortal state had power to forgive sins, how great ought the confidence of a sinner to be in him now dead for sinners, glorious in heaven, and enjoying all his rights and all his power?

“ 11. I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.”

What is sin, but a deplorable fall, a grovelling on the earth, a repose in the creature, often followed by a universal palsy of the soul; namely, an utter inability to help itself, to break off its evil habits, to walk in the ways of God, to rise, or to take one good step toward him? Grace can repair all in a moment; because it is nothing else but the almighty will of God who commands, and does whatever he commands. When God will save a soul, the undoubted effect, always and every where, follows the will of God.

“ 12. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.”

Whence comes it, that we less admire the conversion of the soul, than the cure of the body, but only from the want of faith, and from the love of the present life, which makes us most intent and concerned about the latter? Amazement and admiration caused by miraculous works, and especially by those of grace, should not be barren and without

fruit. The first fruit of it is, to glorify God for them, by adoring and thanking him. The second, to acknowledge how very different his conduct and works are from those of men. Perform in me, O Lord, that which thou didst in this sick person, cure my palsy, my adhesion to the earth and the creatures, my faintness and sloth, and cause me to go towards thee.

SECT. II.—*The calling of St. Matthew. Fasting.
The new Cloth. The old Vessels.*

“ 13. ¶ And he went forth again by the sea-side ; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.”

That man neglects to improve his talent, who takes no care to render the confidence placed in him by others, beneficial to their souls, by instructing them in their duty. Men never go to Christ without receiving some benefit ; the visits made to him are always useful and advantageous. Such let those be which are made to pastors, who ought to have the law of God continually in their hearts, and on their tongues.

“ 14. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alpheus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.”

Such as sit at the receipt of custom are hard to be converted ; but Jesus manifests his power by doing it with one word alone. Grace disengages Matthew from the love of money, to make him an apostle ; the love of money will separate Judas from Christ, to make him an apostate : thus our blessed Saviour

makes himself amends beforehand. St. Matthew's example had no influence on Judas, though perhaps it was Christ's design to lay it before his eyes. Let us profit by the one as well as the other; and let us, with fear and trembling, adore the different judgments of God in relation to souls !

“ 15. ¶ And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples : for there were many, and they followed him.”

Jesus is sometimes found in a house, or in a society, which is full of disorderly people, for the sake of one single person who is faithful to him. This new disciple is not ashamed of his Master, in the midst of this worldly and profane company : and Jesus himself is contented to stay in it with his disciples, to teach his ministers not to despise or disdain any. It is on the account of sinners, that these are sent as well as he : such therefore they ought to seek. Every sinner converted to Christ must endeavour to conduct his friends to him. Fruitfulness is a certain proof of the reality of conversion.

“ 16. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners ?”

How is it, that he is crucified between thieves, will they one day say ? Whoever has not charity, cannot possibly comprehend, what it is capable of doing through a prudent condescension towards sinners ; much less, what it caused Christ to do and suffer for their salvation. It is proper only to Pharisees, to take offence, and be scandalized at the ex-

cess of humility and charity. This is one part of the scandal of the cross and death of Christ, at which the children of this world are offended and take exception, while the children of light find in it their joy and their salvation.

“ 17. When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

The more righteous we imagine ourselves, at so much the greater distance do we remove Christ from us. Let us by no means seek after false comforts, in flattering ourselves with an imaginary health and righteousness. That which alone is substantial and real, consists in our having in Jesus Christ a Physician for all our diseases, and the remission of all our sins. How dear to us ought this his quality of Physician to be, of which he informs us himself! If we are sensible of the need we have of it, let us not neglect often to adore him, to have recourse to him, and to place our whole confidence in the healing operation of his grace.

“ 18. And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?”

The envious are more busied in censuring the conduct of others, than in rectifying their own! This is one vice belonging to a Pharisee, and which is very common. It is another, to desire that every one should regulate his piety by ours, and embrace our particular customs and devotions. It is a third, to speak of others, only that we may have an oppor-

tunity to speak of, and to distinguish ourselves. It is very dangerous for a man to make himself remarkable by such devout practices as are external and singular, when he is not firmly settled and rooted in internal virtues, and, above all, in humility.

“ 19. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them ? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.”

It is prudence, not to overcharge those with outward performances who are as yet weak in piety, lest they be disgusted and discouraged : when their love becomes strong, it will make them do abundantly, and with joy. It is piety, to imitate, by some degree of abstinence at least, the primitive Christians, who fasted Wednesdays and Fridays, in remembrance of Christ’s being sold and dying on those days ; as the church did not fast at all in the forty days after Easter, in memory of the Bridegroom’s continuing so long on earth with his church after his resurrection.

“ 21. No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment ; else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.”

Men often spoil all, for want of well considering the strength and ability of such souls as begin to serve God. The indiscreet zeal of a spiritual director, who requires too much of a penitent at first, often makes him give over all, and renders him the worse. It is a temptation to some beginners, to be desirous of following the perfect in every thing. The

devil seeks either to discourage them, or to puff them up. We must lay deep foundations of humility and the love of God, before we can possibly raise the building of perfection. Love will furnish us with all materials, and humility will preserve them.

“ 22. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles ; else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred : but new wine must be put into new bottles.”

Let us wait till God has strengthened the heart by the new spirit, ere we endeavour to fill it with the severer truths of the gospel. The mind of new penitents is often very forward, and full of a lively warmth, which makes them fancy themselves able to do every thing which they find themselves willing to do : but the flesh notwithstanding is weak and infirm. It is the duty of a wise pastor to use the latter tenderly, and to moderate the former. The means for a man to avoid relapses is, to fear his own weakness, and not to go too fast.

SECT. III.—*The ears of corn plucked. The observation of the Sabbath.*

“ 23. ¶ And it came to pass, that he went through the corn-fields on the sabbath-day ; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.”

Christ, in suffering hunger while his disciples eat, teaches us, that a master, a superior, or a spiritual director, ought to be more perfect than his disciples. He never once wrought a miracle to feed himself or his disciples, though often in very great need, as he did to feed the people ; on purpose to instruct them, not to have recourse on their own account to extra-

ordinary means, without an extreme necessity, and to be more sensibly affected with their neighbour's wants, than with their own.

" 24. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath-day that which is not lawful?"

He who has only the knowledge without the spirit of the law, very often opposes, whilst he thinks he defends it. Pharisaical pride makes men set themselves up for judges of every thing, and require an account of every thing to be given them. When a man is once full of himself, he decides confidently, especially when it is to condemn others. Those who love to domineer, are not content to exercise their authority upon their own disciples, but would fain bring those of others under their dominion.

" 25. And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? 26. How he went into the house of God, in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shew-bread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?"

Charity and necessity are superior to all positive laws. It is good to confound those who pretend to be masters in the divine law, when they are ignorant in it; and a man is so, when he is a stranger to charity, which is the soul thereof. The bread which is offered to God out of religion, is due to man by charity, when necessity makes known the will of God. He who daily feeds his creature, and allows him the use of all his good things, is far from desiring that he should perish. God teaches us to spare nothing,

when our neighbour is in necessity, by giving up (as one may say) to man even that which he reserves for himself.

“ 27. And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:”

The usages and ordinances of religion ought to be regulated according to their end, which is the honour of God and the advantage of men. It is the property of the religion of the true God, to contain nothing in it but what is beneficial to man. Hereby God plainly shows, that it is neither out of indigence, nor interest, that he requires men to worship and obey him, but only out of goodness, and on purpose to make them happy. God prohibited work on the sabbath-day, for fear lest servants should be oppressed by the hard-heartedness of their masters, and to the end that men might not be hindered from attending upon God, and their own salvation.

“ 28. Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.”

Man, on the account of self-preservation, may dispense with a law which God made for his benefit and advantage: with much greater reason, then, might Jesus Christ do it, being the God, the Saviour, and the sovereign dispenser both of the temporal happiness and eternal salvation of man. Let us always take great care to consider chiefly in laws the intention and design of the legislator. This is the way to understand their true meaning, and to do nothing contrary to the spirit of them.

CHAPTER III.

SECT. I.—*The withered hand.*

“ 1. AND he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.”

Let us contemplate our own weakness in this emblem, which represents that total inability of doing good to which sin has reduced mankind. A withered hand, in the sight of God, and in the eyes of faith, is a covetous wretch, who bestows on the poor little or no alms at all; it is a lukewarm and negligent Christian, who performs no good works; it is a magistrate or person in authority, who takes no care to maintain order and justice; and it is a great man who abandons the innocent when oppressed. None but thou, O Lord, can heal this withered hand, because its indisposition proceeds from the heart, and thou alone canst apply thy healing and almighty hand to that.

“ 2. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath-day; that they might accuse him.”

How many are there in the world, who will highly condemn an action which charity or necessity shall oblige a man to do upon a Lord’s-day, whilst they themselves make no scruple of spending whole Sundays in taking the air, in diversions, in revelling, in evil-speaking, in vain conversations, or in profane or criminal correspondence!

“ 3. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.”

It is no other than to be ashamed of that which is good, and of God himself who commands it, not to do it publicly, when it is publicly blamed. We ought not to countenance either the ill-grounded scruples of the weak, or the passion of the envious, by abstaining from a good action which they do not approve, lest we confirm the ignorance of the one, and partake of the bad dispositions of the other. True charity fears not the ill will of men, when the doing good to our neighbour is the thing in question.

“ 4. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath-days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.”

The true sabbath consists in abstaining from evil and in doing good. Where sanctification and charity are, there is the Christian rest. There is a silence which proceeds from the Spirit of God. There is also a diabolical silence, which proceeds from the contest betwixt pride and envy in a pharisaical heart. Would to God, there were not to be found among Christians such as affect to be silent, through fear, either of passing for ignorant persons if they condemn the truth, or of justifying those they do not love, if they approve it!

“ 5. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.”

This conduct, and these dispositions of Christ ought to be imitated by a wise director of souls.

He ought, 1. To have a holy indignation against those who, out of envy, oppose their own conversion. 2. A real affliction of heart on the account of their blindness. 3. A charitable and constant application to those whom God sends to him, notwithstanding all contradiction. 4. He must incite them to lift up, and stretch forth their hands, toward God, in order to pray to him, toward the poor to relieve them, and toward their enemies to be reconciled to them. Stretch out thy hand, O Lord, over us, to bless, protect, conduct, heal, and sanctify us.

“ 6. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.”

5. A wise director should have no apprehension at all of what he may suffer, at the hands of the wicked, or of the pretenders to devotion, for having done his duty. That which ought to have engaged these Pharisees strictly to Christ, to have united them in one common design of becoming his disciples, and encouraged them to defend him, is the very thing which induces them to forsake him, to cabal against him, and to take a resolution of destroying him. My God ! what is a heart which has resigned itself up to envy ? It infects all things, and is infected by all ; every thing provokes it, every thing conspires to complete its corruption and ruin : and even good itself contributes more thereto than evil.

SECT. II.—*The concourse of people. The confession of the devils.*

“ 7. But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea : and a great multitude from Galilee

followed him, and from Judea, 8. And from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him."

A spiritual director ought, 6. Not to provoke the wicked by a fruitless opposition, but humbly and prudently to avoid their presence and their malice. If Jesus Christ is abandoned and persecuted by the wicked, yet a great multitude of pious souls earnestly seek and follow him. When a man labours for the sake of God, he always finds more than he loses in the midst of all contradiction. If the heart of a good pastor is afflicted for the obduracy of some; God comforts and encourages him by the fervency and zeal of others. He is the savour of death to those whose heart is dead, and the savour of life to those whom God calls thereto.

" 9. And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. 10. For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues."

7. A spiritual director must not suffer himself to be so taken up with the external exercise of charity, as thereby to lose the recollection, humility, liberty, and peace of his mind. See here the admirable patience of Jesus! These people seek him with trust and confidence, but at the same time out of interest, and with importunity, yet he receives them all kindly and without the least uneasiness. How grateful would this violence be to him, if they sought him for the sake of their eternal salvation,

and were so earnest to touch him out of a lively and pure faith ! Charity never examines into the intentions, dispositions, or behaviour of men : she opens her hand to all, and receives with gentleness the most importunate and troublesome.

“ 11. And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. 12. And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.”

8. A spiritual director ought to reject the praises of others. 9. He should not have any conversation with scandalous and incorrigible sinners, but only in order to their salvation ; neither should he enter into any society with them for works of piety. The humiliation of hypocrites is like that of the devil, their prayers the effect of a servile fear, and their confession a forced testimony. All this is abominable in the sight of him who requires the heart. The world is easily deceived in taking some expressions of religion and humiliation for conversion, which are only extorted from a reprobate’s mouth by the fear of that Judge before whom he is going to appear.

SECT. III.—*The Election of the Apostles.*

“ 13. ¶ And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would : and they came unto him.”

What talent soever a man may have, he ought not to undertake the ecclesiastical ministry, without some assurance that it is God’s will. This office is a state of perfection, a mountain which none must presume to ascend, without being called up. Jesus

Christ goes up first himself, as being the sovereign Priest, the author and institutor of the Christian priesthood, the fountain of all sacerdotal power, and the principle of the spirit and holiness thereof: a man has no part therein, but only so far as he is associated and united to him.

“ 14. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, 15. And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils.”

Bishops and priests are called to the priesthood of Jesus Christ, 1. In order to make but one priest with him, to extend, complete, and continue his priesthood upon earth. 2. To preach his word, and make known his truth and his mysteries. All ecclesiastical functions are denoted by preaching, because this is a principal function of bishops and pastors, because it is by means of the word and of instruction that the kingdom of God is established, and because the word is likewise made use of in the representative sacrifice, the sacraments, and the other sacerdotal ministrations. 3. To be the physicians of souls, and apply themselves to heal their diseases. 4. To wage war with the devil and destroy his kingdom. Whoever looks upon the sacerdotal state as a state of ease, and not of continual labour, understands but very little these words of Christ.

“ 16. And Simon he surnamed Peter; 17. And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; (and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of Thunder;) 18. And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanite,”

The synagogue is a figure or emblem of the church; the Jewish people, that of the Christian; the twelve heads of the tribes, that of the twelve apostles; and the carnal promises, that of the spiritual. It is for the completion of these promises, and in order to put the elect in possession of them that the priesthood is instituted. And it is at first communicated to twelve, to show the twelve tribes which composed the Jewish church, that it is in Christ and his members that the kingdom expected by them was to be accomplished, and that the children of the church only are the children of promise.

“ 19. And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house.”

Terrible but adorable judgment of God, who sometimes calls to the priesthood one whom he knows will find therein the occasion of his damnation. One of the advantages which God draws from the perfidiousness of one of the twelve apostles, is, to prevent the scandal of wicked ministers in the Church, at which the weak are apt to be troubled. Who will not admire his goodness, his wisdom, and his care in providing for the peace of souls? A pastor who betrays the interests of Christ and his church, is not less on this account the successor of the apostles: for we must always distinguish personal vices from the authority of Christ, and submit to him in the most unworthy of his ministers. He himself submits to authority though lodged in wicked hands.

SECT. IV.—*Christ's kindred. The Blasphemy of the Pharisees. The divided Kingdom.*

“ 20. ¶ And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.”

We see very few of the wise and of the noble come in to Christ, but multitudes of the meaner sort of people, contemptible in the eyes of the world: this is to confound human wisdom, power, and grandeur. We must not set our heart upon these, if we desire to belong to God. Christ teaches his ministers, by his own example, to look upon themselves as the servants and slaves of souls, to wait their time, to think none inconvenient when it is to do them service, and to forget even the necessities of life, when the harvest is great, and an opportunity which may irrecoverably be lost is now present.

“ 21. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.”

A man is never the better for being related to saints according to the flesh. Those whose piety makes them pass for madmen in the opinion of their friends and relations, ought to think it an honour to be treated like Jesus Christ. Let a Christian but neglect the care of his body through the spirit of repentance, let a minister of Christ but impair his health by his pastoral labours, presently he is beside himself, he has not the least conduct or discretion. But let a man forget his soul, let him destroy his health by his debaucheries, let him expose his life out of ambition, and he may, notwithstanding, pass for a very wise and prudent person.

“ 22. ¶ And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of devils casteth he out devils.”

He, in whom dwells all the fulness of the God-head, is himself looked upon as a demoniac, and ac-

cused of being in confederacy with the devil ! What a consolation is this for his most faithful servants, to whom the same crime is sometimes imputed ! A minister of Christ, a teacher of the truth, who is too much afraid of being decried by calumnies, is as yet very far from resembling his master. A man ought to be as careful of his reputation as possible, without neglecting his duty ; but he must expose that as well as his life, when it is necessary.

“ 23. And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan ?

It is a mark of solid piety, to be unconcerned under the greatest calumnies, still to retain meekness and charity, and to instruct those who either through ignorance or blindness happen to join in them. They are very often made up of contradictions ; but the confidence of those who raise them, and the malice or simplicity of those who hear them, supply all defects. Satan does neither calumniate, persecute, nor cast out Satan : and yet Christians do it to Christians, priests to priests, bishops to bishops, and even the creature to the Creator. The Creator suffers this with patience and humility ; and is it reasonable that the creature should be exasperated, incensed, and unwilling to bear it ?

“ 24. And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”

Division destroys the best works, as union establishes, preserves, and perfects them. The world will perish by means of divisions, wars, and enmities ; because it is designed to perish, and because God gives it up to the passions of carnal men. But divisions

and schisms serve only to purify the church, to separate the chaff from the good grain, and to render the elect fit to form the body of unity, which is the church, and to enter into the eternal unity of God. The reason of this is, because his Spirit makes even division itself useful in fastening the bond of unity, and brings out of this darkness the light of peace. Effect this, O Lord, and effect it as soon as possible, according to thy decrees and will.

“ 26. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.”

How guilty then is he who divides the children of the church, by calumnies, dissensions, and jealousies? To divide the church is to endeavour to destroy it; but hereby a man can only destroy himself. Schism is an attempt against the unity of Christ’s mystical body, which is the church; against the unity of his Spirit, which is the bond thereof; against the unity of Christ, who is the head of it; and against the unity of God himself, who is the principle, the pattern, and the perfection of all unity and society, by the unity of his essence, and the society of his persons.

SECT. V.—*The strong Man armed. The sin against the Holy Ghost. Christ’s mother and brethren.*

“ 27. No man can enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.”

There is an irreconcilable enmity betwixt Christ and the devil, the church and hell, the Christian and the world, charity and concupiscence. The former of these two cannot be in any heart but only so far as the latter is therein suppressed. When the devil is

once become master of a heart, none but Christ can drive him out, and destroy his power there. Enter, Lord, into this house, and destroy therein whatever remains of the spirit of that unjust usurper.

“ 28. Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme ;”

See here the extent of God’s mercy towards men who sin either through ignorance or infirmity. The sinner is inexcusable if he neglect to have recourse to God, whatever sins he may have committed. A true penitent is never rejected : the spirit of repentance can procure him every thing from the divine mercy; since, as an earnest of this mercy, he has the word and oath of his Saviour, and the mercy itself of his God, which prevents him, by giving him this very spirit of repentance.

“ 29. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation : 30. Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.”

Who will not tremble, when he considers the rigour of the divine justice against such as sin out of mere malice ? For a man, contrary to the light of his own mind, to attribute to the devil that which God performs by his servants, to oppose the known truth of God, and hold it in unrighteousness, are sins which are very seldom forgiven ; because they either proceed from blindness and hardness of heart, or else produce both, and provoke God to deliver up those who are guilty of them to the errors of a depraved and corrupted mind. To call our blessed Saviour a demoniac, is to resolve to have no Saviour ; not to

acknowledge in him the fulness of that Spirit of which we must all receive in order to salvation, is to reject all forgiveness. Lord, it is thou alone who art my salvation ; it is from thy Spirit alone that I expect my grace and my justification. Purify me, sanctify me, and save me.

“ 31. ¶ There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him.”

What priest is there, who has not reason to apprehend that his relations, how holy soever they may be, will interrupt him, at least in the exercise of his ministry ? The reservedness of the blessed Virgin is very admirable and instructive. Her tenderness towards her son is the cause of her coming ; but her modesty, and the fear of interrupting him, hinder her from advancing any farther. Parents ought with great discretion to use the right they have over their sons who are labourers in the church. They properly belong no more to them, but to God and to Christ.

“ 32. And the multitude sat about him ; and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. 33. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren ?”

It is better for a priest to seem to have too little tenderness for his relations, than to appear to have too much fondness for them. This outward indifference towards the best of mothers, is a great lesson for ecclesiastics, who are apt to be too fondly engaged to their parents by the ties of flesh and blood. On how many occasions do those who enjoy benefices show too great a regard both to their mothers and their brethren, enriching the latter at the blind de-

sire of the former, and at the expense of the patrimony of the poor ! Grant us, Lord, many pastors, ministers, and missionaries, who may be able to say in thy Spirit, “ Who is my mother, or my brethren ?”

“ 34. And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren ! 35. For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother ?”

Nothing joins us more closely to Christ than the performing the will of God. He who does it to the end, contracts an eternal alliance with God as his Father, with Christ as his Brother, with angels and all the blessed spirits as his brethren and sisters, and with the heavenly Jerusalem as his mother. Whoever hears the word of God, with no other intent but to obey it, has already done the will of God in his heart. A beneficed person, who feeds the poor according to his duty, and is himself fed of their substance, in looking upon them ought to say, with joy on one account, and with gratitude on another, “ Behold my mother and my brethren.”

CHAPTER IV.

SECT. I.—*The Parable of the Sower.*

“ 1. AND he began again to teach by the seaside : and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea ; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.”

There are few besides the common sort of people

who are not tired with hearing the word of God. He who chooses such a place as this to preach in, little values the rank and quality of his auditors; but then he finds among them more true lovers of God's word. The finest talent for preaching which ever appeared in the world, was no doubt that of Christ; and yet he has only a bark for his pulpit, poor country peasants for his audience, and the sea-shore for the place of assembly.

“2. And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his **doctrine*,” [**Fr.* way of instructing.]

Christ, and those who speak by his Spirit, have a peculiar way of instructing, very different from that of the preachers of the world. Impart, Lord, this way of instructing to those whose business it is to feed thy people with thy word. Vouchsafe to send them, not vain declaimers, but charitable fathers, real teachers of Christian righteousness, faithful interpreters of thy law and thy doctrines, who may be always intent on instructing others, and not on making themselves admired.

“3. Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: 4. And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way-side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.”

A pastor, a preacher, is a workman hired and sent out to sow the field of God; that is, to instruct souls in the truths of the Gospel. This workman sins, 1. When, instead of going to the field, he absents himself from it; nothing being more agreeable to natural and divine law than for a servant to obey his master, for a seedsman to be in the field for which he

is hired, and whither he is sent to sow. He sins,
2. When he stays in the field, but does not sow.
3. When he changes his master's seed, and sows bad
instead of good. 4. When he affects to cast it on
the high-way. Is not this what they do, who love
to preach only before those they call people of fashion,
given up entirely to the vanity and other passions of
the age, and very little disposed to profit by the
divine word?

“ 5. And some fell on stony ground, where it
had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up,
because it had no depth of earth: 6. But when the
sun was up, it was scorched; and, because it had no
root, it withered away.”

This workman sins, 5. When he fixes on stony
ground, from whence there is little hope of receiving
any fruit. If interest, inclination, the spirit of
amusement, or self-satisfaction, determine a pastor to
attend chiefly on such souls who seek not God, and
whose virtue has no depth, he has but little regard
to his master's profit. Men ought not, indeed, to
exclude any sort of ground, because Christ would
have them preach to all, and because they do not
know the heart; but then they ought not to choose
and prefer one sort before another, for fear of being
guilty of a criminal affection and respect of persons.

“ 7. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns
grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.”

It is a 6th defect, not to take care to pick out the
stones, not to pluck up the thorns, which are in the
field. The sower complains of the barrenness of the
field; and perhaps the field will complain, at the tri-
bunal of God, of the negligence of the sower, in not

preparing and cultivating it as he ought. How many ungrateful and barren fields are there ! And who can say, that his own heart is not such in respect of the divine seed ?

“ 8. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.”

A 7th defect is, the not endeavouring to make the seed in the good ground yield fruit in proportion to its goodness. It is a very great degree of knowledge, to discover the measure of grace conferred on every soul, to give them in proportion that application, instruction, and counsel, which are proper for them, to show them the way of perfection as far as their grace calls them, and to cause them to make all the use which they ought of the truths of the gospel. How few souls are there who are faithful, and bring forth all the fruit which they ought ? How few perfect guides are there, who thoroughly understand the art of conducting souls in the ways of God !

“ 9. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

He alone hears the gospel as he ought who puts it in practice ; and no one can practise it unless Jesus Christ cause him to do it. Let all the world confess, that it is God who gives these ears of the heart, without which none can accomplish his law : to the end, that those who have received them may bless God for this free gift ; and that those who have not may humble themselves, and have recourse to him in order to obtain them.

“ 10. And when he was alone, they that were about him, with the twelve, asked of him the parable.”

God would have us address ourselves to him in order to understand the Scriptures ; and it is for this very reason that they have some obscurity. It is likewise to subdue the pride of man by labour and study, to take off his disgust by variety, and to make him sensible, that to understand the language of God he stands in need of a light superior to reason. In our reading the Scripture, let us frequently ask his Spirit, and not trust to our own, which is but darkness.

“ 11. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God : but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables :”

Do we sufficiently prize this precious gift of faith and evangelical doctrine, and this preference on which our eternal happiness depends ? Is our fidelity answerable thereto ? Let us be very far from insulting them that are without : it is the mercy of God which alone makes us to differ ; his light was no more due to us than to others, and it may be taken from us and given to them. The truths of the church appear to those who are without no other than unintelligible parables. Let them but enter into the church, and its light will soon open their understanding and their heart.

“ 12. That seeing they may see, and not perceive ; and hearing they may hear, and not understand ; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.”

Terrible, but just and adorable is this conduct of God towards those who have deserved to be left to themselves. This dereliction has several degrees.

The first is, their being abandoned to their own darkness. The second, their not being able to understand the truths of salvation. The third, their not obeying them. The fourth, their remaining in their sins. And the fifth, their being condemned. God is pleased to give examples of this, to the end that the children of promise may know how much they owe to grace. It is a mistake to imagine, that whatever appears most severe and rigorous in the conduct of God ought to be concealed from Christians. He himself instructs us in it, on purpose that we should take great notice of it on proper occasions, and glorify him on the account of all the good we do, and of all the evil which we avoid.

“ 13. And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will you know all parables?”

Jesus Christ is very careful to make his apostles sensible, how incapable they naturally are of understanding the Scriptures and mysteries, to the end that they might not ascribe to themselves that knowledge of them which he should one day confer upon them. He here, by intimation, shows the extent of that knowledge of the Scriptures which the ministers of the gospel ought to have, in order to awaken their attention, to excite in them a desire to be instructed therein, and to make them apprehend how much they stand in need of him to this end.

“ 14. ¶ The sower soweth the word.”

The word of God is the seed of salvation. Had we, at the time of hearing the word preached, but this truth before our eyes, That it is the word of God, and that this word is the seed of salvation, could we possibly receive it with a faith so weak and

languishing, and a heart so little prepared? The minister sows nothing but the word: the invisible sower sows even the good-will itself, and causes the seed to spring up therein, and bring forth fruit.

“ 15. And these are they by the way-side, where the word is sown; but, when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

It is very dangerous for a man to have once laid his heart open to the devil, by the love of the world, which is the highway, and by a habit of sin; truth does not often find any more admittance there. Truth is no other than a trust; and we are persons entrusted with all those truths which are delivered to us. Whoever, through the love of the world and sin, permits this trust to be taken away from him, must give an account thereof proportionable to the sacredness of this word. Do thou thyself, O Lord, vouchsafe to preserve in me this depositum of evangelical truths; and to give me humility, which is the guardian of them.

“ 16. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17. And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.”

Whoever has not the root of charity, has no other than a stony heart for the word of God. The brightness of truth may cause some joy and gladness for a time; but if grace be wanting, and a man must renounce the conveniences of life, then truth becomes odious, and is an occasion of sin. Those truths which

should give us life, give us death, when the love of truth itself does not reign in our heart. Men ought to rejoice with humility at the knowledge of the truth. The weakness under which they find themselves, in times of trial and temptation on the account of the truth, is often the punishment of that vain joy and ostentation with which they gloried in it.

“ 18. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, 19. And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

When the word of God has caused some good desires to spring up in the heart, they continue fruitless and without effect, if a man open it to the passions and lusts of the world. To profit by good desires, it is not sufficient that the heart be not hardened by sinful habits, it must also be in a condition to apply itself to divine things, and to make use of the means of salvation, prayer, reading, sacraments, &c. The world is full of people whose hearts seem to be open to every thing which is good, and shut against every sin; but they being likewise open to the things of the world, take their fill of them, and are lost. To open only the bodily ear to the word of God, is not properly to hear it: it is the ear of the heart which we must open to it: it is in obeying it that we must receive it.

“ 20. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”

Those profit by the word, who hear it with joy,

retain it with fidelity, and practise it with zeal. The several degrees of bringing forth fruit here mentioned, denote as many several degrees of charity, as many different states of the Christian life, and as many employments or talents more or less profitable, more or less proper for piety, and more or less meritorious (in God's account.) To bear an hundred-fold for one is the state of perfection. It is a very great happiness to be called hereto, provided a man be faithful in observing every thing which the perfection of this state requires. Sometimes sixty is better than a hundred for some certain souls—for a middle state, all the duties whereof a man performs exactly, is, without comparison, surer than a more elevated one, where the fidelity does not rise in proportion to the height.

SECT. II.—*The Candle under a Bushel. He who hath shall have more.*

“21. ¶ And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?”

Truth will not be stifled. The knowledge of our duty must not be unprofitable, nor our talents without fruit. They must all be employed for the church. Let us bear witness to the truth, whenever there is occasion, and make our faith evident by our good works. This is the way whereby every one may set the candle on the candlestick. A man may hide from the world some good works; but a Christian life is a lamp which ought to be seen by every body; a public testimony which we owe to our faith, and an example which the church requires of us.

“ 22. For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested ; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.”

The doctrine of Jesus Christ has nothing in it which fears the light ; it is itself the light which must enlighten the world. It is the property of heretics and libertines to propagate their tenets in secret. Every thing is brought to light sooner or later. The humble person conceals his virtue in this life, but God will disclose it at the day of eternity. The hypocrite hides his wickedness here, but he shall suffer an eternal confusion for it in the sight of heaven and earth.

“ 23. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”

Whoever has the ears of concupiscence to hear the things of the world, and to fill his heart therewith, has not the ears of charity to understand the truths of salvation. He who has these, ought to humble himself, and return thanks for a preference which he by no means deserves. He who has them not as yet, ought to humble himself and pray, in confidence that Christ has merited them for him.

“ 24. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear : with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you ; and unto you that hear shall more be given.”

Whether God speak to us by the general truths of the gospel, or do it by opening our understanding and heart to some particular truth, it is both a respect due to him, and a thing necessary to our own salvation, to give good heed to that which he requires of us. If a man would not deceive himself, he must receive the truths and inspirations in their full extent,

and not restrain them through fear of being obliged to do too much. The reward will be answerable to the fidelity: if we are sparing towards him, he will be so towards us. Let us love and serve him without measure, who will give himself without measure to us. Let us do ever so much, there can be no manner of comparison betwixt that which we do for God, and that which God prepares for us.

“ 25. For he that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.”

The good use of knowledge and grace draws down more: the ill use leads to blindness and hardness of heart. The one is an effect of grace itself: the other, an effect of a depraved will. A faithful soul has a great treasure. The riches which it heaps up have scarce any bounds, because it puts none to its fidelity. A base and slothful soul grows poorer every day, until it is stripped of all. Who can tell the prodigious stock which is acquired by an evangelical labourer, a zealous missionary, who crosses the seas on purpose to seek souls whom he may convert, and is intent on nothing but the salvation of sinners! The greater his grace is, the more it increases by labour. O how happy and holy is this usury of a faithful soul!

SECT. III.—*The Seed cast into the Ground. The Grain of Mustard Seed.*

“ 26. ¶ And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; 27. And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not

how. 28. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

Christ himself cast the seed of the word from which his church sprung up, and he formed it himself after a conspicuous manner, by the preaching and miracles of the apostles, and by the blood of the martyrs of the first ages. He seemed, as it were, to sleep in the following ages, while it continued to grow up insensibly, during the night of adversity and the day of prosperity. How adorable is thy conduct, O my Saviour, in the establishment of thy kingdom; and how admirable are the secret operations of thy grace in those souls which thou formest for heaven! Grace has its different ages and gradual increase: its growth is imperceptible. When a soul is once arrived at that measure of age and fulness, according to which Christ is to be formed in it, then God withdraws it from the world.

" 29. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

As Jesus Christ himself cast the seed into the ground, so he will also himself reap the harvest at the general judgment. How fearful ought we to be, lest we should let the time of harvest come before that of our ripeness, death before the conversion of our hearts, and judgment before the performance of good works! How terrible will this voice be, The harvest is come to those who shall then be only in the blade, or in an imperfect ear! My God, vouchsafe to ripen thy fruit thyself: render me worthy to be of that good grain which is to be offered up to thee as the fruit of eternity.

“ 30. ¶ And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?”

How amiable is this carefulness of the Son of God! How instructive to the ministers of his word! He is not solicitous in seeking fine turns of eloquence to charm the minds of his auditors, nor in drawing such representations, descriptions, or comparisons as may surprise them: he studies only to make himself understood, to instruct to advantage, to give true ideas of faith and piety, and to find out such expressions as may render necessary truths easy and intelligible to the meanest capacities. This is what must be imitated.

“ 31. It is like a grain of mustard-seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: 32. But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”

That grace, which in its beginning is the least, may be the greatest when it comes to its full growth: insomuch, that he who has it, will become superior even to those who were advanced the highest in perfection. Happy those souls, who, being no longer scandalized at what appears low, imperfect, and contemptible in the church, now lodge under the shade of it with the joy of faith! Extend, Lord, the branches of this plant, which thou hast watered with thy blood: let it fill the whole earth: let it gather under its shade those whom the pride of error, or the delusion of false pastors, does yet keep at a distance from it.

“ 33. And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.”

A man must adapt himself to the capacity of those whom he instructs. He need not fear stooping too low, when he considers himself as the dispenser of the mysteries of abased wisdom. The gospel is more for the poor and simple, than for the refined wits; and yet a minister thereof is sometimes, as one may say, afraid of being understood by the simple, lest he should not be admired by the learned.

“ 34. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.”

The true disciples of the truth partake of her greatest secrets. Whenever she seems to hide herself, it is in order to humble those lofty spirits who are puffed up with their own knowledge; to make them sensible how much they stand in need of her illumination; to oblige her children to have recourse to her spirit; and to cause them to adore her judgments upon the one, and her mercy towards the other.

SECT. IV.—*The Storm appeased.*

“ 35. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. 36. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. 37. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.”

When a man walks with too much confidence, temptation rises on a sudden, and his heart would certainly be overwhelmed by it, if God did not stretch

forth his hand to sustain it. By being in ship, that is to say, in the church, with Christ and his apostles, we are not in a state of perfect safety, and secure from all temptations. The waves of heresy toss it from without; but the corruption of manners within, like the water which beat into this ship, puts it in much greater danger of perishing. This corrupt water shall be cast out, and the ship will then arrive safe in the harbour.

“ 38. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?”

If Jesus Christ seem to be asleep in times of persecution or temptation, it is only to oblige us to apply ourselves to him, and to lay before him our danger with fervency and confidence. Jesus sleeps indeed, but his heart continually watches over his disciples and his church. When the church is in great straits he expects to be awakened, that is, invoked with the loud cries of charity, and the importunity of prayer. It is to the prayers and groans of the church that he vouchsafes to grant peace and a calm. Nothing is more grateful to him than this complaint of his true disciples and of holy bishops, which shows their concern for the church, their compassion on its evils, and their confidence in him.

“ 39. And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”

When passions the most violent, temptations the most dangerous, and the dread of the greatest evils, put our hearts in the most perilous condition, why do we not fly to him whose almighty will can quiet

and allay all in a moment? The true idea of grace is this, God wills our obedience, and he is obeyed; he commands, and every thing is done; he speaks with authority, and all things are subject to him. O Jesus, the only refuge of those who are tempted, the strength of the weak, and the sole hope of thy church, thou seest its afflictions, its troubles, and all its wants: pronounce but over it this word of peace which calms all in an instant, and peace will immediately be restored to it.

“ 40. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?”

After a temptation is overcome, let every one consider, whether he has not reason, 1. To reproach himself for his want of trust and confidence. 2. To condemn the cause of it, which, perhaps, was want of faith. God is so good, that he despises not a faith as yet weak, refuses not imperfect prayers, nor rejects and discourages a heart which is too fearful. What faith, what confidence should we not have, did we but take care to reflect on God’s conduct towards his elect in all ages, and his judgments upon their enemies?

“ 41. And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

3. We must in the next place, after a victory over temptation, with fear and trembling consider the danger out of which we have been delivered by Jesus Christ. 4. We must retain the dread of it in our hearts. 5. We must willingly entertain one another with the mercies we have received from God. 6. We must adore his power and his goodness.

How comfortable and edifying would it be, to see Christians thus entertain one another, in their conversations, with the majesty and wonderful works of God, with the sovereign power of Christ over the heart, and with the admirable examples of obedience, submission, and inviolable adherence to his will, wrought by his Spirit both in sinners and in saints ! God's power over insensible beings is set before us in the gospel, as no more than an emblem or representation of that which he exercises over rational creatures. Nothing is of greater importance than to be thoroughly convinced of this, which is the ground and foundation of our confidence.

CHAPTER V.

SECT. I.—*The legion of Devils cast out. The Swine drowned.*

“ 1. AND they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. 2. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,”

Hell is a tomb out of which the unclean spirit will continually come forth, until the judgment of God shall shut him up therein. The heart of an unchaste man is a stinking sepulchre, in which he is himself buried, and wherein there is nothing but corruption and rottenness. A criminal beauty is a whitened sepulchre which insensibly defiles and infects those who continue near it. No sin so entirely possesses the whole heart as that of uncleanness: none

more nearly resembles the possession of the devil. The first step toward a deliverance from it, is for a man to present himself before Jesus: but how exceeding difficult is it for him to come out of his grave, to present himself to the light, there to lay open a heart full of the most shameful crime, and to raise a soul, which is become altogether earthy, up to him who is purity itself! This is the work of thy grace, O my God! Cause the power of it to shine forth in the destruction of this vice so contagious and fatal.

“ 3. Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:”

An inveterate habit of uncleanness frequently extinguishes all the principles of the Christian life; and an unchaste soul dwells in its body as in a loathsome sepulchre, where there is nothing but the remains of worms and corruption. This is but too often literally true. An unchaste person is a madman, whom every thing provokes, whom nothing stops, and who will not bear the least restraint.

“ 4. Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.”

Natural physic is by no means capable of curing an unchaste person, a heavenly physician must be employed. We may, indeed, remove from him the occasions of his sin, or bind him hand and foot; but nothing but the Spirit of God alone can make itself absolute master of the heart wherein lust reigns. Were this violent passion no more than a chain of iron, another person might be able to manage it; but as it is, nothing but the Spirit and will of God can

break this chain of flesh and blood, which the unchaste man has made for himself of his depraved will.

“ 5. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.”

This passion renders a man brutish, robs him of his rest by night, gives him a continual uneasiness all the day, carries him into the excesses of rage and fury, and drives him even into contrary extremes. How heavy and insupportable is the yoke of sin ! How cruel a tyrant is the love of the creatures ! There is no pleasure but in bearing the amiable yoke of thy law, O my God ; there is no true rest to be found but only in thy love.

“ 6. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, 7. And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God ? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.”

At how great a distance soever from salvation an obstinate sinner may be, yet when Jesus once shows himself to him by the saving light of his grace, which illuminates the understanding and gains the heart, he must of necessity submit, he must run, he must humble himself, and adore his Saviour. A man can never leave sin without violence ; he can never root up an evil habit, but nature must suffer deeply. She fights against grace ; she causes the flesh to strive against the Spirit, and will against will. Whoever loves impurity, dreads to be delivered from it, and omits nothing to continue himself under that miserable possession.

“ 8. (For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.)”

Jesus cannot suffer the spirit of uncleanness in his presence. One word alone of his, that is to say, one grace of our blessed Saviour, decides the combat betwixt the two men, and renders the new man victorious. No unclean spirit whatever can hold out against the Holy Spirit; no rebellious will can be disobedient to the will of God, when he commands as God. Command, Lord, this unclean spirit, which reigns in the world and in the sinner, and both the world and the sinner will immediately change their nature.

“ 9. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.”

Uncleanness is rather a multitude of vices, than one particular sin. It does not belong to all persons to discourse with the unclean spirit; none but the Holy One of God can do it without danger of being infected thereby. He speaks to him with the authority of a judge, and the church does so in his name, because he has given her power to judge the world, and the prince of the world. The sin of uncleanness is very rarely without accomplices. It is the duty of a spiritual guide to examine sinners upon this point with prudence and caution.

“ 10. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.”

The devil takes delight in the souls which he has for a long time possessed. It is a ~~very~~ dangerous illusion, not to break with this sin entirely and without reserve. To be willing to enter into a sort of composition with lust, and not to fly all the occasions of it, is to be willing to settle in the very region and

country of sin. He deceives himself, who pretends that an impure love will ever be changed into an honest and innocent familiarity. The devil is not much concerned, provided he can but maintain some small correspondence with a heart out of which he has been driven.

“ 11. Now there was there, nigh unto the mountains, a great herd of swine feeding. 12. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.”

How many are there in the world, who, after the example of these devils, abstain from one sin, only in order to commit another ! If we do not examine ourselves thoroughly, we shall easily mistake vices for virtues. We may change the object without changing the sinful desire. There is no other way to turn concupiscence into charity, but only by restoring God to his proper place, which has been usurped by the creature. The devil has no power to hurt man, or any thing belonging to him, without God’s permission. Being only the instrument of his justice, he executes nothing but by the order of Christ the sovereign Judge. It is a certain sign of want of faith and trust in God, for a man to fear the devil, any otherwise than as his slave and as the executioner of his justice.

“ 13. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine ; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand,) and were choked in the sea.”

God often grants to the wicked, through a motive infinitely holy, that which they ask for a criminal

end. He makes use of the devil, either to punish sin or to exercise virtue; and both in the one and the other, he makes him against his will subservient to his glory. When the devil cannot hurt men in their persons, he endeavours to do it in their goods. But when he thinks he hurts a Christian most, then it is that he is sometimes most instrumental in promoting his salvation, either in curing his avarice by the loss of his goods, or in taking away his health which he abused against God, or in removing him from the occasions of sin, or in purifying him from his imperfections and faults.

“ 14. And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. 15. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind; and they were afraid.”

When a man is delivered from his evil habits, then only he possesses his soul in peace, and is free indeed. If an instance of some extraordinary conversion serve only to excite fear and trouble in a soul by reason of some temporal interest, it is little disposed to receive any spiritual advantage thereby. In order to this, a man must worship God, enter into himself, examine his own heart, and have recourse to God with peace and tranquillity of mind: it is thus that he ought to answer his designs.

“ 16. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. 17. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.”

Whoever loves earthly possessions and enjoyments

will not long preserve Christ in his heart. Alas, there are but too many who strive to part with Christ by parting with the faith by which he dwells in them, and which does not well agree with their passions! The carnal man shakes with fear, when he considers that grace has prevailed with some souls to divest themselves of all things. He dreads that grace which leaves a man nothing but his God: but how miserable is the heart to which its God is not sufficient!

" 18. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him."

When a man is in a public station, he ought to be very cautious of taking into his house, or admitting to the sacred ministry, persons who, before their conversion, have led a very scandalous life. A penitent should resolve to follow Christ in his humiliations, to imitate him in the sacrifice of Christian virtues, and to adhere to him by a sincere acknowledgment, and by all the ties of religion: but he must not think of aspiring to that state which belongs only to the innocent.

" 19. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not; but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

God sometimes requires of a person newly converted, nothing but a grateful acknowledgment of heart, and a good example in his family, by a regular life and conversation. A great measure of grace, received by us in order to our own sanctification, ought sometimes also to be made instrumental to-

wards that of others. The grace of conversion is a talent which a man ought to improve to the utmost, in making known the majesty of God, the inexhaustible riches of his mercy, and the power of his grace. One cannot better set forth his goodness than by openly making a very great acknowledgment of his benefits.

“ 20. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: * and all men did marvel.” [** Fr. The great graces he had received of Jesus.]*

A thankful heart can very difficultly confine itself within the narrow bounds of gratitude prescribed to it. There are some graces which are proper to be published; and there are others which ought to be concealed. It is just to publish those, which, being preceded by heinous sins, cannot be ascribed to any thing but the pure mercy of God, and which are visibly counterbalanced by our demerits. It is the safer way, to conceal such as may be looked on as the reward of great fidelity in making a good use of those which a man has received before. The glory of God, and the advantage of our neighbour, are the rules to be observed on this occasion. He who does not publish them of his own accord, when they are extraordinary in their kind, and the example may be dangerous to the weak, shelters his neighbour’s weakness under the veil of silence, and his own under that of obedience.

SECT II.—*The Bloody Issue healed. The Daughter of Jairus raised.*

“21. ¶ And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea. 22. And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, 23. And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. 24. And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him.”

We pray with earnestness for a person whose soul is ready to quit the body; and we look with indifference upon a soul which is on the point of losing its God. Let us judge by this father’s grief, what that of a spiritual father full of charity must needs be, when he sees a soul which is committed to his care in danger of falling! Who can tell with how much humility, fervency, and importunity, he solicits for grace at the feet of Christ for that soul? Happy the daughter who has found such a father! happy the father, exact and faithful in his duty, who has the bowels of Christ towards those souls whose infirmities and miseries he fully knows!

“25. ¶ And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years,”

Jairus is an emblem of the Jewish people, for whom Christ came in the first place, but who are not to be saved till after the Gentiles, of whom this woman is a type or figure, both by the nature of her

distemper, and by the preference which she receives. God has his proper times and moments. He seems to neglect a sinner, and not to hear his prayer: but very often he only defers it. The secret is, to have patience, and not to give over following him in his ways.

“ 26. And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,”

It is a great piece of infidelity for men not to think of God in afflictions until they have experienced the insufficiency of human remedies. What a mercy is it to be forced to have recourse to God, by misfortunes, diseases, or the ill usage of men! See here a representation of those physicians of souls, who, not acting in the name and in the spirit of Christ, do nothing else but feed and increase their maladies. Men are very far from doing as much for the health of the soul as for that of the body, and from giving all for eternal salvation, as they willingly spend all they have for temporal life. They are apt to seek out such physicians from whom they may suffer little or nothing, such as are likely to be most easy and gentle; and scarce will they hear speak of bestowing some slight alms. What wonder then, if such persons are nothing bettered, but rather grow worse!

“ 27. When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment:”

The Gentiles, represented by this woman, passing as it were through the crowd of the Jewish people, approach Christ, and believe in him. A sinner oftentimes, by means of his faith, receives a grace

which seemed to be designed for a just person. To touch the garment of Christ, is to believe that he clothed himself with our flesh for our sakes, it is to unite ourselves to him by a lively faith, to put our trust and confidence in the merits of his mortal life, to apply ourselves to the mysteries accomplished in his flesh, and to imitate the mortification which he himself underwent therein. Alas, we are unwilling to touch this with one of our fingers !

“ 28. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.”

In the mysteries of Jesus Christ we find a sovereign remedy against the diseases which have taken the deepest root in the soul. Every thing is holy, efficacious, and full of a divine virtue in the Mediator of our peace : every thing is saving in the Author of salvation. O God, how oft do we touch, receive, and eat his representative body in the eucharist ; and yet, through our own fault, we continue still subject to the same infirmities ! It is because we do not approach him as this woman did ; with the same faith, the same confidence, and the same humility.

“ 29. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up ; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.”

The grace of Christ is the only remedy for all the most inveterate diseases of the soul. This will dry up the very fountain itself of sin, which is concupiscence, when the time of the perfect reign of charity shall come. It at present stops the course, the reign, and the dominion of concupiscence. The healing operation of grace alone can do all in a mo-

ment: the delays of it do not proceed from inability and necessity, but from dispensation and wisdom. When will it be, O my Saviour, that it shall drain in me the source of all sin, that it shall dry up that fountain of corruption and iniquity which I carry in my flesh and in my heart?

“ 30. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?”

The Gentiles belong to Christ, and received his grace, as it were contrary to his design and first intention. There are graces which are gotten, as it were, by stealth, and which may be called surreptitious graces: so surprising do they appear, and contrary to the ordinary conduct of God. If any thing were capable of surprising wisdom itself, it would be a faith which is humble and full of confidence at the same time. What part soever of Christ such a faith touches, on whatever it lays hold in order to go to him, he is sensible thereof, and suffers himself to be gained thereby.

“ 31. And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? 32. And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing.”

Jesus Christ takes more notice of a soul which seeks him in silence, in the spirit of faith, and by humble and secret ways, than of a multitude of common Christians, who do nothing but through custom, and in the way of external devotion. He seeks those in his turn who have sought him, and who could not have done it but by his grace: that is to say, second graces crown the first. He hides the

operations of his grace under appearances altogether human, because this is the time to establish the belief of it, not to unfold its mysteries, and to manifest its glory.

“ 33. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.”

A timorous humility, and a perfect thankfulness, raise sometimes an innocent contention in a soul. There is a confidence arising from pride, which blinds men, and makes them take defects for virtues. There is a diffidence proceeding from humility, which hides their virtues from them, and makes them sometimes take them for defects. It is a sight very pleasing to Christ, to see a soul humbled at his feet, whose only crime is excess of faith and greatness of confidence.

“ 34. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.”

The time of comfort succeeds that of pain and trouble. It is to humility and faith that God gives this comfort. What joy must it be to a soul which believed itself wanting in its duty, to understand that its fidelity has not received the least blemish, and that it has been conducted in every thing by its faith ! The word of Jesus Christ sometimes confounds and humbles souls; sometimes it comforts and raises them from their dejection. This word, and a spiritual guide or director, who has been well nourished therewith, 1. Make men sensible, that the reason why they are exercised and humbled is because they are children of God. 2. Teach them to discern that

which proceeds from faith from that which does not. 3. Restore to them peace of mind, and calm the troubles of conscience. 4. Confirm them in virtue, and in a full persuasion and confidence of the good state of their hearts.

“ 35. ¶ While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue’s house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master any further?”

Thus it happens sometimes, that a ghostly father hears of the death of a soul which he loved entirely, and for which he had grieved a long time. God permits this, in order to the humiliation both of this soul and of this father, and that perhaps to cure both the one and the other of their too great fondness and affection. He must be sure not to abandon it in these circumstances, nor to give admission to such thoughts as are merely human, and produce nothing but vexation, discouragement, and despair. He must, on the contrary, pray with greater earnestness, and with new sighs importune him who is the absolute master of the heart, and the author of salvation.

“ 36. As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.”

It often happens, that when faith has brought a sinner as it were to the very point of a perfect conversion, this faith suffers greater shocks than ever by thoughts of distrust and despair. A wise director of the conscience ought to dispel these by fortifying his faith, and making known to him the goodness of God, and the power of the grace of Christ. At first Christ spoke not one word to this afflicted father,

gave him no manner of hopes, seemed entirely to neglect him, and applied himself to the cure of another diseased person ; but as soon as he perceives his trust and confidence assaulted, he then speaks to him. God will be entreated a long time in behalf of a soul, and suffers it sometimes to fall, in order to make the power of his grace more evident and illustrious.

“ 37. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James.”

Let us thus learn from Christ, not to impart, except only to a few chosen persons, those works of God which we are to undertake, for fear lest they should be obstructed. The Spirit of God would have us labour in secret as much as possible ; whereas the spirit of the world continually affects noise and applause. A prelate who ought to form good pastors under him, should act in concert with them, and impart his designs to those who are principal workers together with him.

“ 38. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. 39. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.”

The death of sin in the elect is nothing but a sleep, because they will infallibly awake from it. It is not in the midst of the noise and confusion of the world that a man should endeavour to raise his own soul or that of his neighbour, but in retirement and silence. Men are often apt to make too much ado about the fall of a soul. They defame it, they discourse of it with a sort of grief which is too human, loud, and sometimes despairing, or else from motives

not very charitable or Christian, and which often proceed from interest. One should perhaps very much puzzle these mourners, if one obliged them to answer this "Why," and to discover what passes in their heart upon the death of their friends or relations, or upon the disgraces and falls of their neighbour. It is good to put this question to ourselves.

" 40. And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying."

The world laughs those to scorn who hope every thing from the goodness and grace of God: the reason is, because it has no faith at all. A man must as much contemn the infidelity of the world, and perform his duty. How desperate soever the condition of a sinner may appear, we must neither insult over it, nor despair of his conversion. Perhaps he is one of God's elect, in whom he will make the power of his grace evidently appear by raising him up. In order to this, he must enter into the very place where he is dead, namely, into his heart. Those who have been witnesses of the disorders which bring death on the soul, ought likewise to be so of its conversion.

" 41. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha-cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, (I say unto thee,) arise."

If God vouchsafe not to take our heart in his hand, it will never recover from its sin. The sacred humanity is as it were the hand and instrument of the Divinity, to which it is united in the person of

the Word. It is from this humanity that our life proceeds, because it was in this that Christ died and rose again, and completed his sacrifice. He is man, since he takes this dead person by the hand ; he is God, since he commands her to live and to arise, and is immediately obeyed.

“ 42. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked ; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. 43. And he charged them straitly that no man should know it ; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.”

None but God can make his voice heard by a soul which is in sin, because it is as great a miracle as to make a dead man hear it. Observe here the order of conversion :—1. To rise, by forsaking sin, its habits and occasions. 2. To walk a long time in good works. 3. To retire from the world, and to keep silence for some time. 4. To eat the living bread of the eucharist.—One ought to take great care not to give this bread to a dead person. That which ought to precede this divine food, according to the order here intimated by Christ, is, that a man should rise, leave the bed wherein he was dead, and walk in the practice of virtue, with such edification, as even to cause admiration in those whom he has before offended and scandalized by his sins.

CHAPTER VI.

SECT. I.—*Christ contemned. No prophet honoured in his own country.*

“ 1. AND he went out from thence, and came into his own country ; and his disciples follow him.”

Christ did not begin his preaching in his own country, and it was late before he preached there at all ; and this in order to teach priests to have little regard to human and natural affections.

“ 2. And when the sabbath-day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue : and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things ? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands ?”

It is common for men, when they would elude the force of a sermon, to fall upon the preacher. They lose the benefit of useful and practical truths, by fixing on nice questions which have no relation to manners. How can these men own the miracles of Christ, and yet pretend to be ignorant from whence he has his doctrine ? Is not this wilfully to shut their eyes, that they may not believe ? Worldly-minded men cannot choose but admire a truly Christian preacher, but they always find pretences enough for not submitting to what he delivers.

“ 3. Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon ? and are not his sisters here with us ? And they were offended at him.”

The world cannot esteem that which proceeds not from it. False wisdom is blind, and is an obstacle to the true. The humble condition of Jesus Christ is an occasion of offence and falling to many. It seems to be unworthy of him, but it was necessary on our account: and he chooses rather to be wanting to his greatness, than to his love. Men ought to bring along with them to sermons their ears and their heart, in order to hear the word of God, to receive, to love, and to retain it; but not their eyes, that they may not be offended at the external and apparent defects of the preacher. Let us cautiously avoid the common error of affixing the gifts of God to the outward advantages of nature or fortune. This is a delusion of the world, worthy of its infidelity.

“ 4. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.”

The fond adherence of a priest or a preacher to his own kindred and house, renders him very little serviceable in the exercise of his ministry. If he have faults, they are known there, and he becomes contemptible; if he have great talents, they excite envy, and he is opposed; if he make himself familiar, he loses respect, and his authority suffers thereby; if he do not, he is counted proud, and avoided. The property of an evangelical minister is to be, as it were, another Melchisedec, without country, without house, without relations, or to be as if he had none.

“ 5. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.”

Ingratitude, joined with incredulity, ties, as it

were, the hands of the divine goodness. The only revenge which the gospel allows us, is to overcome evil with good. The infidelity of a whole people does not hinder the mercy of God from extending itself over the small number of elect who are mingled with them.

“ 6. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.”

Jesus wonders at that at which he would have us wonder; and he takes notice of our faults, to the end that we may reflect upon ourselves. How much more strange and surprising are our own infidelity or unsuitable returns, after the instruction and miracles of so many ages!

SECT. II.—*The Mission and Power of the Apostles.*

“ 7. ¶ And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two ; and gave them power over unclean spirits ;”

Union and good understanding betwixt the ministers of the gospel is necessary to the progress and advancement of it. Christ shows this in sending them forth by two and two. The end and business of the ministry is to destroy the kingdom of the devil in the world. Judas received power and authority over him as well as the rest of the apostles : but of what advantage is it for a man to cast him out of the body of his brother, if he open his own heart, and through avarice surrender himself up to him, as Judas did ?

“ 8. And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only ; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse : 9. But be shod

with sandals; and not put on two coats. 10. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place."

The ecclesiastical ministry requires a perfect disengagement from temporal things, to take away from the people all suspicion that the clergy act only out of self-interest. Ambition and avarice are the two things which frequently ruin a preacher and all his labours. There are very few examples now-a-days of this perfect indifference as to worldly things which Christ here enjoins to the apostles. A man is not obliged to serve the church by actually depriving himself of all things; but whoever is not ready to be deprived of all, rather than be wanting to his duty, is not worthy to succeed the apostles.

" 11. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."

The greater the labours of ecclesiastical ministers have been, the more will they condemn those who have not profited thereby. One of the greatest punishments of their neglect is, that the word of God shall be taken from them. If men have reason to fear being deprived of the truth, when they despise its ministers and neglect to hear them, what judgment of God will fall upon those who persecute them! Jesus Christ neither enjoins nor permits his apostles to employ their apostolical power to avenge themselves, nor even to desire that he should do it. It

is the part of a minister of truth and charity, to labour without ceasing, to suffer without resentment, and to leave his cause to God with a full trust and confidence in him.

“ 12. And they went out, and preached that men should repent.”

John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and his apostles, both before and after his death, always began their preaching with the subject of repentance : so great is the necessity of this duty. Those who do not preach it, who weaken the obligation and decry the practice thereof, follow very little the footsteps of the apostles or of Jesus Christ. Awaken the spirit of repentance, O my God, in this age, which has so great need of it ; and vouchsafe to give true preachers thereof to thy church !

“ 13. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.”

Here is an emblem of the several duties of a pastor: namely, courageously to prosecute incorrigible sinners, to treat the weak with mildness, and to apply himself to all with zeal.

SECT. III.—*The Imprisonment and Death of John the Baptist.*

“ 14. ¶ And king Herod heard of him ; (for his name was spread abroad :) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.”

The very memory of just men who have been oppressed, torments their persecutors. The sinner has no peace when he desires to have it, because he rejected it when God was pleased to offer it to him.

Strange condition this, for a man to be forced to bear witness to the innocence of a saint whom he has oppressed ! This is only a fruitless confession, extorted from the mouth of a criminal, not a profitable acknowledgment of the holiness of a servant of God.

“ 15. Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets.”

The judgment of the world is very uncertain in all things, but extremely blind in those which relate to God. There are no conjectures so extravagant, but men will have recourse to them rather than believe the word of God : so corrupt is the heart of man ; so true is it, that blindness is the just punishment of incredulity. These Jews, in their several judgments, afford us a lively representation of those pretended masters of reason, who affect always singularity in their opinions, and who believe every thing except truth.

“ 16. But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded : he is risen from the dead.”

God exercises his justice upon the sinner even by his sin itself. He need only deliver him up to his conscience to be avenged of his iniquity. See here the repentance of a reprobate, who is not ashamed to confess his crime, and yet is ashamed to do penance for it. If the bare thought of St. John’s resurrection gives Herod so much trouble, how will it be when all the elect restored to life shall rise up in judgment against their persecutors, and demand vengeance on them !

“ 17. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herod-

dias' sake, his brother Philip's wife ; for he had married her."

Unchastity is unjust and cruel. A man sacrifices every thing to an infamous creature when he has once made her his idol. God commonly punishes one enormous sin by another more enormous. There is no dreadfuller punishment of public lewdness, than for a man to be abandoned to wickedness, to persecute God's ministers, and to murder a saint.

" 18. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife."

The world will always charge it as a crime on righteous persons and zealous preachers, for them to rebuke sinners, and to speak the truth without regard to any man. It is a very grievous misfortune which attends the great, to be accustomed to be never contradicted in the least things ; they will not be so afterwards in their most unjust passions. This is the fruit either of a bad education, or of a prostituted flattery. These persons are resolved to be praised, and when they have no virtues which can be commended, it seems their very vices become the subject of commendation on pain of death.

" 19. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him ; but she could not :"

An adulteress cannot suffer any obstacles to her passion. When sin is once conceived in the heart, the person sooner or later finds an opportunity to finish and complete it. The difficulty of satisfying a violent passion does only inflame and stir it up the more.

" 20. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him ; and

when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly."

The sin of the flesh stifles the best thoughts, and all the good desires which the word of God has produced. The world is full of persons who take a pride in esteeming virtue, and in paying a particular respect to good men, so long as they give them no disturbance in their passions. But these become odious to the world, as soon as ever they contradict its corrupt inclinations. A man is always ready to hate those whom he honours only out of policy, or through a self-interested hypocrisy, and because he is afraid of their censure and reproofs.

" 21. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod, on his birth-day, made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee ;"

A crime is more than half committed, when it is once resolved on; a convenient day cannot be long wanting to a passion so violent and vigilant as revenge animated by an infamous love. The feasts of the world are days very convenient for sin, as the feasts of the church are for piety. It is a great misfortune to be engaged to be at the former; a great imprudence not to provide against the infectious air which is there breathed; a great piece of unfaithfulness not to excuse ourselves from going when we can; and a very great folly to appear there without any manner of obligation.

" 22. And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod, and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. 23. And he sware unto her, What-

soever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom."

Fatal alliance this betwixt good cheer and lascivious objects: it is the source of the greatest evils. How is it possible for a person to go innocent out of those assemblies for diversion, from whence God's presence is excluded as much as possible; where they do not speak of him but to dishonour him; where all the senses are besieged and intoxicated with pleasures; where reason, hurried away by passion, becomes incapable of informing and directing the will; where unbridled lust, without the least restraint, sees nothing but what excites it; and where modesty and reservedness become a crime!

" 24. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. 25. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me, by and by in a charger, the head of John the Baptist."

Vanity, feasting, and lasciviousness joined together, render a person capable of all sorts of crimes. How dangerous are dancing and balls, and how many tragical effects do they produce! They awaken the criminal passion of Herod, and deprive him of his liberty and reason; they renew in the heart of Herodias the spirit of revenge, hatred, and rage against St. John; they make her daughter lose all shame and modesty; they cause all three to join in the horrible and sacrilegious murder of one of the greatest of saints; and involve this whole court in the crimes of injustice, cruelty, revenge, an impious oath, impurity, and several other which accompany the sin of Herod.

“ 26. And the king was exceeding sorry ; yet for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. 27. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought : and he went and beheaded him in the prison,”

Observe here in Herod, hypocrisy, superstition, and too great a regard to men. His sorrow is the sign of the remorse of his conscience; and his conscience is his accuser and a witness of his crime. It is a penal blindness, justly due to the abuse of light and instruction, for a man to make a scruple of not performing an unjust oath, and to make none of delivering up an innocent person and a saint, at the request of a dancer, to the revenge of an incensed adulteress. An oath is criminal, and by consequence void, when it cannot be performed without sin and injustice. How dangerous is it to take but one step in the paths of sin, since it is so very difficult to go back and retreat from it !

“ 28. And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel : and the damsel gave it to her mother.”

See here the fruit of a bad education, a wicked daughter of a wicked mother: they are serviceable to one another in order only to sin and damnation. Revenge causes a person to take pleasure and delight in that, which, if passion were absent, would raise the greatest horror. This is a dreadful example for this sex, which is naturally so soft, timorous, and bashful: a woman could not arrive at once at such an excess of fury, as to prefer the present of a head swimming in blood before every other favour

which she might have asked. A person, by the least acts of infidelity, may rise at last to the greatest crimes, and to such as are most contrary to natural inclination. One is capable of every wickedness, when one is capable of forgetting God.

“29. And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.”

Behold here, how one of the best of men, the Bridegroom’s friend, and a zealous preacher of the truth, passes the last days of his life in disgrace at court, dies under oppression, is meanly buried, not one person daring to speak for him—and is abandoned by all, except some few faithful friends, who carry him in silence from the obscurity of a prison, to the darkness of a grave. But the time of the man of God will come, when the time of man is past, and that of God is come.

SECT. IV.—*Christ’s retirement. The Miracle of the five loaves.*

“30. ¶ And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.”

How good is it for a minister to recollect himself near Jesus Christ after his labours! How sweet is that repose which he tastes at the feet of truth, after missions, pastoral visitations, and the fatigues of preaching! And how necessary is this repose, to keep him from being too much satisfied in himself and in his good success through a vain complacency, or from continuing, as it were, out of himself by distraction of heart! To give account to Christ, is for a man to examine his heart and his own conduct in

his presence. There are many who give this account to themselves, with respect to their actions and their faults; but few think of doing it, as the apostles here did, with respect likewise to the doctrine which they have taught, examining whether it be sound, founded on the word of God, and proper to lead souls to perfection and salvation.

“31. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. 32. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.”

The zeal of a bishop ought not to be harsh towards his fellow-workers; but he should take care of those who labour much in the church, he should be tender of their health, and procure them rest. He must neither tempt the weak by toils which are above their strength, nor urge the strong to exert their very utmost abilities: but he must consider their wants, and apply himself to the relief of them; and not give the devil an opportunity of tempting them, by tiring them with immoderate and continual labour, or by forgetting their necessities.

“33. And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.”

Happy those labourers in the church, the sweet savour of whose life and conversation attracts people after Christ. The intermission of extraordinary labours is not only advantageous to the ministers themselves, but it serves likewise to awaken the zeal of the faithful, and to make them desire more ardently that which they no longer enjoy.

“ 34. ¶ And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd : and he began to teach them many things.”

We see abundance of priests, of doctors of the law, and Pharisees among the Jews, but not one pastor or shepherd. Jesus Christ alone is the good Shepherd, and they reject him. His charity is one of the marks or characters of his mission. He who feeds not his people with the word of God, as much as is necessary, is by no means a pastor. How many of Christ’s sheep, both on this and on the other side of the seas, have no shepherds ; while so many of the clergy, either shamefully live in idleness, or unprofitably tire themselves in works of vanity ! Lord, this flock and these sheep are thine : vouchsafe to send them pastors of thy own choosing, and according to thy own heart.

“ 35. And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed ; 36. Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread : for they have nothing to eat.”

The earth is a dark and desert place, where the soul can find no manner of sustenance but by Jesus Christ. Can it beg this of him too frequently ? The charity of the apostles is provident indeed, but they know not as yet the extent of that of their Master. To whom should these people go, having found him who provides the food both of temporal and eternal life ! He has bread to give them which they know not of.

“37. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?”

Charity cannot resolve to desert the miserable under the greatest seeming impossibilities. A man cannot peremptorily refuse an alms, unless he has given or forsaken all for Christ’s sake. If there be any defect in the charity of the apostles, it is their considering more their own poverty, than the riches and power of their Master, and their not having recourse thereto. We ought to make use of our credit and interest in behalf of the poor, when we cannot relieve them ourselves.

“38. He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. 39. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. 40. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.”

The Christian feeds on five loaves:—1. On Jesus Christ and his mysteries, in applying himself to them by faith. 2. On his word, by hearing it. 3. On his body, in receiving it. 4. On his grace, by confiding in it. 5. On his will and righteousness, in doing it.—And that he may relish them the better, he makes use of the example of the humble and suffering life of Christ and of the saints.

“41. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.”

If Jesus Christ does not give his blessing, and cause men to make a holy use of this divine food, it will only do them harm. It is his appointment, that we should receive it by the ministry of ordinary pastors. It is to them that he has intrusted his loaves; it belongs to them to distribute them, as the trustees of his power and charity. He shows them in his own person, in what disposition they ought to be, in order to dispense his gifts with advantage: they must acknowledge that they come from heaven, and that nothing belongs to, or proceeds from themselves, but the imperfections which they mix with them; that it is the unction and benediction they have received from and by Jesus Christ which renders them beneficial; and that, being designed for their neighbour's edification, they are to be dispensed in such a manner as may be most profitable for him, and most according to his capacity.

" 42. And they did all eat, and were filled."

My God! how few are there who sufficiently consider the infinite difference there is betwixt eating, and being filled; and that more in relation to the food of the soul, than to that of the body! Those eat without being filled, who make a considerable progress in the knowledge of Christ, and little or none at all in his love; who read his word without profiting thereby; who partake frequently of his representative body, without partaking of his Spirit; and are very exact in outward performances, without any inward piety.

" 43. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. 44. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men."

The treasures of the truths, word, sacraments, grace, and mysteries of Jesus Christ are inexhaustible. Here is a slight draught of what God requires of a pastor, and of what a true pastor expects from God. The word, truths, and sacraments, which he dispenses after a holy manner, are very often more profitable to him than to those to whom he dispenses them. Wonderful is the usury in this dispensation: the less a man puts out of his own, the greater is his return; the less share he has in the principal, the higher his interest rises; and the more he seems to lose, the more he certainly gains.

SECT. V.—*Christ prays, walks on the Sea, and cures all the Sick.*

“ 45. And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. 46. And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.”

Retirement and prayer always succeed the great and remarkable works of Christ: in this his ministers and members ought to imitate him. Retirement is so necessary to those who labour, that if they are not of themselves inclined thereto, they should be urged to enter into it, after the example of our Lord. It belongs to bishops to procure the conveniences proper for it, and to furnish the subordinate pastors and other labourers with the means thereof, to set them an example of it themselves, and to support, instruct, and encourage them therein.

“ 47. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.”

Christ enjoys perfect rest and felicity in the bosom of his Father, while his church is in the midst of the sea of this life. Every one of us is no other than a little bark rowing against the wind, in a tempestuous sea, encompassed with the darkness of the night, and destitute of all help and succour. He who is not afraid in this condition, sees not the danger of it; whoever sees it, and does not pray, knows nothing of his own weakness.

“ 48. And he saw them toiling in rowing: (for the wind was contrary unto them:) and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.”

Every thing is contrary to salvation without Jesus Christ. He leaves us sometimes to ourselves, on purpose that we may know ourselves, and the need we have of him: but he never loses sight of us. This is an emblem of the church guided by its pastors. Did men but consider them as mariners, always tugging at the oar, always rowing against the wind, and always in danger, they would not envy their condition. Their comfort is, that Christ has his eye continually on the bark, that he sees their pains and difficulties, and will certainly come to their assistance. He frequently lets a great part of the night pass away, without succouring his church in a plain and sensible manner. This is to give us occasion to exercise our trust and confidence towards him, and to wait his proper time.

“ 49. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: 50. (For they all saw him, and were troubled:)

and immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid."

We sometimes take the inspirations of God for no other than illusions. His word and his light cause us to distinguish them. We have but little knowledge of his ways, and oftentimes that which he designs for our good terrifies us. There is sometimes a kind of mutiny in the ship of the church, and a great clamour is raised at the sight of certain truths, as if they were errors; and even those who sit at the helm are alarmed at a phantom which they fancy they see. But as soon as Christ speaks, and they are capable of hearing him, his truth manifestly appears, their apprehensions vanish, and all grows quiet.

" 51. And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered."

Jesus Christ, who is present to the heart, and to his whole church, makes the storms of temptation, persecution, and error to cease, whenever he pleases. How strange is the darkness of this present life! The presence, word, and miracles of Christ—every thing here disturbs the weak, every thing is to others a matter of scandal or offence. But wo be to him who gives any occasion thereof!

" 52. For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened."

How rarely do men preserve the remembrance of the favours and blessings they have received! If they did, it would give them trust and confidence when they have most occasion for them. We are amazed, and that with reason, to find that miracles so evident did not open the eyes and understanding

of these poor disciples : but are not all our senses surrounded on every side with the wonderful works of God, and yet we scarce so much as take any notice of them ? The miracle of the loaves is wrought every day. And we less admire in this the divine goodness and power, for no other reason, but only because these attributes are really more admirable herein, on the account of the regular, constant, and unchangeable order in which it is performed.

“ 53. ¶ And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. 54. And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, 55. And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.”

Men readily enough know and own Christ, when he bestows upon them temporal benefits ; but they seldom call to mind the benefits which he has done to the inward man hidden in the heart. We must not think of enjoying Christ by ourselves, and receiving the whole advantage of his truth and gifts. We ought to invite others to partake of them, to diffuse the sweet odour of his name, and to assist the weak to the utmost of our power : this is one part of the duties of the members which belong to one and the same body, and the very spirit of the communion of saints.

“ 56. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment : and as many as touched him were made whole.”

Happy that sick person, who, following the ex-

ample of these people, is never weary in seeking out the true Physician, by a faith and confidence accompanied with good works! Let us learn to profit by the presence of Christ, who comes to us so many different ways. To assist the sick, to give or to procure them remedies, is a work of charity very acceptable to Christ; but how much more so is it, to be instrumental in restoring to them the health of the soul! God affixes his assistances and graces to whatever he pleases, to the hem or border of Christ's garment.

CHAPTER VII.

SECT. I.—*Unwashen Hands. Human Traditions.*

“ 1. THEN came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. 2. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled (that is to say, with unwashen) hands, they found fault.”

They know God but little, who imagine that he has any regard to external cleanliness. The neglect of some certain degree of neatness, when it proceeds from the spirit of repentance, and a contempt of one's self, may honour God, as much as the affectation of neatness dishonours him, if it proceed from self-love, and a desire of pleasing men.

“ 3. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.”

Blind wretches, to value themselves upon a superstitious practice, and to think it meritorious! False traditions, which are founded only on popular errors,

are sometimes religiously observed, whilst those which are holy and sacred are neglected.

“ 4. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.”

It is the heart which a man must wash, it is the inward part which he must examine, when he has been busied about worldly affairs, and which he must cleanse in the presence of God from the filth which it may have thereby contracted. External performances are more apt to puff up than to sanctify, when not animated by the Spirit of God. To such as place their whole religion in them, they generally become an occasion of condemning and calumniating the most virtuous persons.

“ 5. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?”

One of the greatest marks of the corruption of the heart is, for a man to place the main of religion in outward performances, whilst, at the same time, he violates charity, which is the whole law of God. It shows great ignorance in the way of salvation, to disturb the church with unprofitable questions or trifles, as if the essentials of the gospel were in dispute, and, in the mean time, to neglect the commandments of God. The things from which, before our meals, we ought to wash and cleanse, not our hands, but our hearts, are the forgetfulness of God’s benefits who feeds us, that greediness and haste with which we commonly sit down at table, the suggestions to

intemperance and sensuality, and the neglect of offering to God this action, and beseeching him to sanctify it by his Holy Spirit.

“ 6. He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 7. Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Sacrifices, fasts, mortifications, and alms, are good in themselves, but when the heart is not with God, they are only a body without a soul. Some human usages are no better than a vain worship, and an honour which God accepts not ; and that not only such of them as are directly opposite to his commandments, but those also which amuse, divert, and hinder the creature from paying to the Creator the necessary duties of religion. Let my heart draw near thee, O my God, by the imitation of thy goodness ; since this is the honour which thou dost require.

“ 8. For, laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups : and many other such like things ye do.”

It is a strange instance of corruption, to set the traditions and ordinances of men in the place of the commandment of God. Self-love is infinitely pleased with this change, and with bestowing on pots and cups that care and application which is due to ourselves. Nothing is troublesome to us, provided we be not obliged to change our hearts. If we do not literally imitate these Jews, let us take heed that we do not something equivalent.

“ 9. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject

the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

Self-love inclines us to adore our own inventions, even to the prejudice of God's commandments. The openly wicked do not perhaps contribute so much to the weakening the truth of the divine law by their vicious lives, as those who make profession of loving it do by their explications and relaxations, which are contrary to the Spirit of God. The former are discredited by their very lives, and make no impression upon any but such as are like themselves; whereas the latter gain credit by their profession, and are heard with confidence by good men.

" 10. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death :"

It is a very great proof of the corruption of nature, that it was necessary to make a law concerning a duty which one cannot neglect without being unnatural. Next to God, our parents are the first persons whom he would have us honour, as being the most lively images of the First Person of the blessed Trinity, from whom all paternity in heaven and earth is derived, and the channels which convey to us the first gifts of God—being, life, education, subsistence, &c.

" 11. But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free."

It is no other than to insult the divine law, to make a jest of religion, and to trample charity under foot, for a man to dogmatize against the first by inhuman and unnatural maxims, to cover himself with the se-

cond as a cloak for this avarice, and to seem to value himself upon the third at the same time he is destroying it. In vain do men endeavour to colour over their impiety with the finest pretences imaginable : God sees it, God judges it, and will one day lay it open before the eyes of the whole world.

“ 12. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; 13. Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered : and many such like things do ye.”

The honour due to fathers and mothers, both by divine and natural law, consists not in bare words, but in assistance spiritual and temporal, in respect, obedience, and obliging carriage, in bearing with the defects either of temper or of age, and in helping and supporting them in sickness, poverty, and troubles, without growing peevish, ashamed, or tired ; and all this, neither through hypocrisy, interest, or human regards ; but from a sense of duty, out of gratitude, piety, love, and religion, and to honour our heavenly Father in his image. To take away from parents what is due to them, in order to give it to the church, is sacrilege rather than sacrifice. God will not accept that from the hand of the priest, which he expects to receive from us by the hands of our parents.

SECT. II.—*It is the Heart which defiles a Man.*

“ 14. ¶ And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand : 15. There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him : but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.”

This is a rule concerning Christian liberty, of great use, but understood and followed by very few. It ought not to serve as a veil to cover intemperance, disobedience, or want of charity in the use of meats; but as a direction in order to our living like true servants and children of God, by the spirit of faith and charity, by the mortification of the heart and its passions, by inward and spiritual purity, by adoration in spirit and truth, by the spirit of the gospel, which makes Christians, not by the spirit of the law, which makes only carnal Jews.

“ 16. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”

This rule must needs be of very great importance to Christians. For our great Master, 1. Calls all the people unto him on purpose to tell them only this: (ver. 14.) 2. He requires of them a particular attention. 3. He requires it of every one of them without exception. 4. He exhorts them to endeavour thoroughly to understand it. And, 5. He here lets them know, that in order to do it they have need of a singular grace, and a particular gift of understanding. It was for want of understanding this rule, that the Jews still remained Jews, adhering to a mere external way of worship. It is for the very same reason, that abundance of Christians, even at this day, serve God like Jews and not like Christians.

“ 17. And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. 18. And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; 19. Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?”

Let us fear that more, which, arising from ourselves, is lodged in our hearts, than that which enters from without into our bodies. How could the Jews possibly know of what remedy and what physician they stood in need, since they did not well know either the disease of man, or the source and cause of it, which is sin and the corruption of the heart? The Jew, full of the ceremonial and figurative law, is mindful only of the external impurities which it points out, and of the remedies it prescribes, and by his superstitious exactness increases the number of them: the Christian, enlightened by faith, applies himself to discover and know his own heart, his diseases, and his only physician, Jesus Christ.

“ 20. And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.”

How much ought we to distrust our own heart, since that which it produces of itself is nothing but falsehood and sin! Whatever love of truth and righteousness it has, must proceed from some other source. Lord, it is thou who art this source, without which, nothing in me is pure and innocent. Pour forth on my heart thy celestial water, wash away its impurities, moisten its dryness, heal its wounds, soften its hardness, warm its coldness, bring it again into thy ways, and vouchsafe to guide it therein.

“ 21. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22. Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23. All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

The heart of man is by the grace of Christ a

source of all good ; and of all evil, by its own wickedness. Sin is always committed in the heart before it appears outwardly. There is no sin without the love of ourselves ; as there is no good work without the love of God. It is through thy grace, O my God, that so corrupt a soil as that of my will does not produce all these accursed fruits. It is through thy mercy, that whatever of them it does produce is plucked up and forgotten before thee.

SECT. III.—*The Woman of Canaan.*

“ 24. ¶ And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.”

God resists the humble person as well as the proud: the former, by making him manifest when he hides himself; the latter, by humbling him when he exalts himself. An evangelical labourer ought of himself to be disposed to live private and concealed, but without any prejudice to what he owes his neighbour. Happy is that person who is made manifest, not because he will not, but because he cannot be hid.

“ 25. For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet ; 26. (The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation;) and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.”

Every sin is an unclean spirit which possesses the sinner. It is at the feet of Jesus that he must seek a remedy for it. Would to God the sinner had the same zeal and earnestness in regard to his soul which this woman has for her daughter’s deliverance, her

fidelity in not letting slip the opportunity which God presents, and that humility which causes her to fall at the feet of the sovereign Physician ! Few mothers resemble this. The generality, instead of shutting the heart of their daughters against the evil spirit of vanity, of impurity, and of the love of the world, or of endeavouring to cast him out thence, rather set it open to him a thousand different ways.

“ 27. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled : for it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.”

Jesus Christ, faithful to the Jews, notwithstanding their ingratitude, notwithstanding all the evil effects of it which he foresaw, by his own example forbids us to return unfaithfulness for unfaithfulness, or evil for evil. Let parents learn from him, not to do any injustice to their children out of revenge or hatred ; to give those the preference to whom it is due, and not to favour the rest with a larger share than the law allows. God tries those on whom he intends to bestow great favours. A seeming rigour frequently prepares the way for extraordinary blessings.

“ 28. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord : yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.”

Faith and humility are very ingenious and eloquent before God. This woman gives us an idea of a true penitent, who is willing to be treated with a holy severity, to be humbled even for the faults committed in his repentance, to judge himself unworthy of the Lord’s table ; so far is he from being impatient at being kept back from it, is satisfied with

the crumbs, and endeavours in some measure to deserve the bread of his soul by exercises of humility, by the love of God's word, and by prayer. When God undertakes to humble the sinner, he has no other part to choose but to submit to his conduct, and to put himself into a condition of attracting his compassion.

" 29. And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. 30. And when she was come to her house she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed."

Of how great importance is it to improve all the opportunities which God vouchsafes us for the exercise of any virtue; salvation, sometimes depending upon one single opportunity! To neglect this and let it slip, is to hazard all. The devil is not able to resist humility: even God himself does not. Here is a great miracle granted to one word of faith, but of a faith which is itself a gift of God. His goodness is so great, that his gifts become our merits. How great comfort is it to a Christian mother, when God is pleased at last to grant to her prayers the salvation of a daughter possessed with the spirit of the world! But how few are there who beg this blessing!

SECT. IV.—*The Deaf and Dumb person healed.*

" 31. ¶ And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis."

Charity has its rules and measures in the distribution of spiritual good things, as well as in that of

temporal. We do not see upon what account Christ leaves one country to pass into another: the reasons hereof are hidden in the secret designs of God. One advantage which Christ draws from it is, to show us that he is absolute master of his own gifts, and that he owes us nothing, to keep men under the apprehension of losing him, and to induce them to profit by his word and benefits while they enjoy him.

“ 32. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.”

Human nature was incapable of hearing the doctrine of salvation, and of acknowledging its own misery, when the Son of God came to seek it: and every sinner left to himself has this double inability in some degree. A man is deaf and dumb, when he refuses to hear the truth, to be attentive to it, and to obey it. Deplorable deafness this, which is voluntary, and of which a man is unwilling to be cured: for as soon as ever he is willing, and humbly begs a remedy, he is no longer either deaf or dumb. The charity of the church supplies the sinner’s impotency by her prayers and sighs; and her authority, denoted here by the imposition of hands, applies those graces to him which her charity has obtained.

“ 33. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;”

How great is the mercy shown towards a sinner, when God chooses him out of a multitude of others, on purpose to give him faith, and the grace to confess his name! Nothing but the merits, word, and grace of him who is both God and man, can open our

heart to the truth, can infuse into it the love and relish thereof, and inspire it with courage to confess it. Every thing is efficacious in Jesus Christ, every thing is full of virtue, because every thing in him is united to the word and to the eternal wisdom.

“ 34. And, looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. 35. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.”

It is by prayer, and the secret sighs of the heart, that Christ applies his merits, and that the church does it after his example. If the conversion of a sinner cost Jesus Christ so many desires, prayers, and sighs; is it not reasonable that it should likewise cost the sinner himself some? Is it not necessary that his servants, called and separated to this work, should be men of desires, prayers, and sighs? That which Christ does here, is the pattern which a minister of the church ought to follow, who, in the exercise of his ministry, in performing the ceremonies of the sacraments, and in pronouncing the words and prayers over sinners, in the name and by the authority of the church and of Christ himself, ought to lift up his heart toward heaven, to groan and sigh in behalf of those under his hand, and to expect every thing from him who is the sovereign Master of all hearts. O Jesus! pronounce over mine, over the hearts of sinners, and of all those who ought to hear thee and to speak in thy stead, these words, “ Be opened,” and thou shalt be immediately obeyed.

“ 36. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it;”

A benefit becomes so much the more worthy to be published, by how much the more he who does it endeavours to conceal it. The humility of the benefactor, and the gratitude of the receiver, may very well oppose each other without any prejudice to the peace of their heart. Though Christ be not here obeyed, yet his prohibition is not altogether fruitless, since it affords an instruction for his ministers, and a pattern for all his members.

“ 37. And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.”

It is proper only to Christ to make man capable of hearing the voice of his God, and of praising his majesty. He did nothing but what was useful and beneficial to men, because it was for their sakes that he was made man. That which we owe to the actions of Christ, is not only to admire what is great and illustrious in them, but likewise to consider the tendency and design of them. It is a very great commendation of a minister, to say, that he does all things well; that is, with gravity, modesty, and external decency, and with application, piety, and internal religion. This is the way to make even the deaf to hear the truth, and to draw from sinners an acknowledgment and confession of their miseries.

CHAPTER VIII.

SECT. I.—*The Miracle of the Seven Loaves.*

“ 1. IN those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them,”

Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, seems desirous to take advice of his disciples, that he may set an example to the chief pastors of the church. He permitted this want, and chose this opportunity to feed this people, on purpose to teach the poor to have recourse to him as their refuge in their necessities, and to put the rich in mind, that it is he who keeps them from falling into poverty, and who gives them all their wealth and riches.

" 2. I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat;"

Jesus Christ has had his elect before the law, under the law, and from the time of his incarnation; which three periods are represented by these three days: and in all these seasons they have been, and shall be, with him by means of faith, hope, and charity. Alas! how much did those who lived before the incarnation, long after Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven, who freely gives himself to us, and is become our daily bread ! The Jews having nothing but types and shadows, and carnal sacrifices, incapable of nourishing the soul, had, properly speaking, nothing to eat: in like manner the Gentiles, who had nothing but what was capable of giving them death. All thanks be rendered to thee, O holy and adorable Victim, true bread of souls, for having had compassion on thy people, and having given them thyself for their food and nourishment !

" 3. And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far."

Faith grows weak, hope faint, and charity cold,

during the pilgrimage of this life, especially in those who have been a long time at a distance from God, unless he vouchsafe to give them new strength. They come from far who come from the region of sin, which is so remote from God. Jesus Christ himself is the living bread, which is the happiness and joy of angels in the heavenly country, and the strength and remedy of men in their way thither. Christ does not feed those who came from far, till he has nourished them a great while with his word, tried their fidelity and perseverance, and fully known their want and their hunger. Thus great sinners are to be treated, before they are fed with the eucharist.

“4. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?”

Nothing here below is capable of supporting, healing, and satisfying the heart of man. The Holy Ghost supports it by his strength, Christ heals it by his grace, and God will satisfy it with his glory. Can we fear wanting any thing when we have Jesus Christ with us, when we have him for our pastor? Yes, Lord, thou art our pastor, and nothing will ever be wanting to those who trust in thee, and are within thy fold, which is the church.

“5. And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.”

These seven loaves are emblems of the seven habitual gifts of the Holy Ghost, of which our blessed Saviour makes use to weaken in us the contrary habits, and to strengthen us against concupiscence. O Holy Spirit, who didst rest on Jesus Christ, in order to fill his members through him, be

thou our wisdom to raise us to the knowledge of the mysteries of religion, our understanding to comprehend the truths of salvation and our duties, our counsel in all our doubts, our strength in all our weakness, our knowledge in whatever belongs to our vocation, our piety in all our actions, and our filial and religious fear in all the temptations of this life.

“ 6. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people.”

The Word took these seven gifts in his incarnation, inspired them into the apostles by sending the Holy Ghost, and by their ministry has shed them abroad in the hearts of all the faithful by the means of the word and sacraments. Without a new gift, without the benediction of his actual grace, which is obtained by prayer, we can make but an ill use of these habitual gifts. In order to prepare ourselves for the reception of them, we must humble ourselves, and adhere to the body of the pastors and true successors of the apostles. They are sent by Jesus Christ to be the dispensers and ministers of these gifts.

“ 7. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.”

The bountiful hand of Christ’s love never blesses and multiplies, but only in order to distribute: whereas the niggardly hand of secular love gathers and heaps together with no other intent but to hoard. We do not find that Jesus Christ ever gave a bless-

ing to great riches, but only to some few things necessary to life: which was to show us, that it is through his invisible blessing, that the poor, who are religious, always find wherewith to subsist, and are more contented in their poverty than the rich in their abundance.

“ 8. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. 9. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.”

The gifts of God fill the heart without being wasted or diminished, and multiply in all the faithful. It is Christ who blesses our food, and renders it sufficient for us, when by prayer we in his name and Spirit bless our provisions before we eat. In doing this, let us always have before our eyes this blessing of Christ, and beseech him that his invisible hand may bless us as well as his gifts, and cause us to use them after a Christian manner. Bless us, Lord, and these thy gifts, &c.

SECT. II.—*A Sign refused. The Apostles reproved for their want of understanding.*

“ 10. ¶ And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. 11. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.”

Nothing is sufficient to make him see who is wilfully blind. None but Pharisees seek Jesus Christ to dispute with him. He would have men seek him as disciples and scholars, not as wranglers and cavillers. Many, even at this day, converse with him and

study his truths in the Scriptures, only out of a spirit of disputation and contest, never satisfied with that which satisfies all others. New miracles are wanting for some sort of persons, and yet they would not fail to take occasion even from them to raise new disputes.

“ 12. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.”

The voluntary blindness of the great pretenders to learning and strong reasoning, is the most deplorable condition imaginable, and that out of which they seldom recover. There is nothing to be done for these persons, but only to groan and sigh deeply for them from the bottom of the heart. Miracles are of no manner of use to those who are resolved not to believe. For what reason do these Pharisees, and others like them, seek after signs and miracles, but only that they may have the pleasure to contest the truth of them, to nonplus religion if possible, and to reduce it to want of proof? Let us adore the conduct of Jesus Christ, and imitate his wisdom.

“ 13. And he left them, and, entering into the ship again, departed to the other side.”

God generally abandons these disputers to the vanity of their own mind. It is a dreadful judgment when truth withdraws itself entirely from a person, and leaves, as it were, a chaos or deep sea between itself and a mind puffed up with pride. Every one has his share of this spirit, few are sensible of it, and all ought to fear lest it remove Christ at a distance from them.

“ 14. ¶ Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf.”

How happy is he whom the relish of Christ’s word causes to forget the necessities of life. This forgetfulness will be the occasion of new instructions: for Christ makes every thing contribute to the salvation of his elect.

“ 15. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.”

Every state has its leaven, as it has its grace. The leaven of the pretenders to devotion is hypocrisy and envy, that of courtiers and great persons is ambition and crafty policy. These are two sorts of enemies which truth and its disciples have most reason to fear. Every one ought to take heed, and to secure himself from them, not by artifice or violence, but by arming himself with patience and trust in God, by adhering steadfastly to the truth, and by continually watching over himself, that he may not be drawn away either by authority or deceit.

“ 16. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread.”

The perfect Christian still raises his mind from sensible things to spiritual: the imperfect lets his sink insensibly from spiritual to sensible and carnal things. The more faith decreases, the more a man concerns himself about the wants of the body, and the more his sight of spiritual things decays. It is very useful and important for a man to say frequently to himself, Eternity is that about which I ought to be chiefly employed.

“ 17. And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?” * [* *Fr.* Have ye yet neither sense nor understanding, and is your heart continually in blindness?]

How justly is this reproof due to those Christians who are altogether taken up with the cares of this present life! If this anxious solicitude is blameable even in the poor; how much more is it so in those who have necessaries in abundance? To distrust God, after all which he has done to make known his providence over mankind, and his fatherly care towards his children, is to want not only faith, but even sense and understanding. Illuminate us, O Lord, anew with thy light, and suffer not our hearts to fall into this blindness!

“ 18. Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember,”

One may well apply this with more apparent truth to those children of the earth who mind nothing but earth, and heaping up of riches. They have no eyes to see the vanity and frailty of these things, no ears to hear what faith declares to them concerning them, and no memory to remember how God overturns at his pleasure the greatest fortunes, and scatters abroad that wealth wherein they put their whole trust and confidence.

“ 19. When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. 20. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said,

Seven. 21. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?"

The little use we make of God's gifts, our forgetfulness of his particular benefits, and our not taking sufficient notice of the visible wonders which he works every day for us in the world, make it evident, that sin has spread its darkness over the understanding of man, as well as over his heart. There is need of somewhat more than miracles to establish faith and Christian confidence. Without thy grace, O Jesus ! man still remains what he is of himself, even in the midst of the most surprising prodigies. It is not to insult thy disciples that thou speakest so harshly to them in appearance, but to make them sensible of their condition and their wants, and to oblige them to put their whole confidence in thee.

SECTR. III.—*The Blind Man cured.*

" 22. ¶ And he cometh to Bethsaida ; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him."

Jesus employs all means to make us apprehend this truth, That all human nature is, through sin, become blind as to the things of God. It was in order to cure it that he united himself thereto by his incarnation, and that he has, as it were, touched it with his person and divine substance so closely as to make with it but one and the same person. This cure advances in proportion as Christ unites himself to any particular soul by faith and charity. Our heart is like a blind person, which we must frequently present to Christ, that he may touch it with his invisible hand. Charity ought to imitate him in ap-

plying itself to enlighten those who are ignorant of their own blindness, and do not desire to be cured of it.

“ 23. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town ; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.”

The humility, wisdom, and power of the word incarnate, concur to the curing of our blindness. Ignorance of the truth, or spiritual blindness, is generally both the daughter and mother of pride. A man must manage those prudently whom he designs to cure of this blindness, taking them aside in private in order to make them sensible thereof, how public soever it may be. The hand of our blessed Saviour is an emblem of his healing grace, and of the conduct of his ministers. He here uses it to three purposes :—1. That he may be a guide to this blind man whilst he continues blind. 2. That he may apply the remedy to him. 3. That he may give him imposition of hands.—A man may imitate Christ herein, 1. By treating the person spiritually blind with a charitable mildness before his cure. 2. By applying to him the remedy of evangelical truths with a great deal of discretion. 3. By praying, and doing good offices for him.

“ 24. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. 25. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up ; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.”

The cure of our blindness is only begun here on earth : for our understanding has some degrees of darkness which will not be dispersed until we come

to heaven. This cure requires abundance of patience; because the light of truth does not often enter all at once into the soul. God would have men learn the greatness of the evil, the necessity of his grace, and the difficulty of the cure, from the delay of his light, and the several degrees thereof through which they must pass. It is one of the duties of a pastor and spiritual director, to study this gradual progression, and not to leave the patient until he is perfectly cured.

“ 26. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.”

When man shall be perfectly cured of his blindness, he will praise God in the eternal silence of his house. Let us begin the sacrifice of thanksgiving here below. Retirement of one sort or another is, as it were, necessary after conversion. When a man has once received the knowledge of the truth, he must long meditate upon it in private, feed on it in silence, and let it take deep root in his heart before he speaks of it. There is an eagerness to impart it to others, which does not proceed from God, and may be prejudicial to beginners.

SECT. IV.—*The Passion foretold. St. Peter rebuked.*

“ 27. ¶ And Jesus went out and his disciples into the towns of Cesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?”

None but Jesus can speak of himself without danger. It is very advantageous to discourse of his mysteries in journies and in common conversations.

It is neither out of ignorance, nor curiosity, nor want of other discourse, that Christ speaks on this subject; but, on the contrary, from a knowledge of the different opinions men had concerning him, and from a desire to satisfy their curiosity by the truth, and to avoid by means of holy instructions the loss of time which usually attends travelling.

“ 28. And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.”

The world is blind as to every thing which relates to Christ. It is not by leaving our understanding to its own conjectures that we discover Christ and his truths, but by consulting the Scriptures. Extreme blindness this, that men should be willing to trust to themselves in this matter without the least proof or evidence, rather than depend on Christ, who declares it himself, proves it by miracles, and confirms it by prophecies.

“ 29. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.”

The true knowledge of the mysteries of Christ is not to be found, but only among the disciples of the truth and the light. Out of his school, there is nothing but uncertainty or falsehood. O Jesus! Thou art the Christ, that is, the Anointed of the Lord, sent to save the world; anointed with the Divinity itself, that thou mayest communicate part of thy unction to thy members. Render me faithful to this grace in always following the Spirit of the divine adoption.

“ 30. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.”

Pride gives men the curiosity to know what the world says of them : Christ plainly shows that he is very far from it, since he will not as yet be known. Truths have their proper time of discovery : let us not anticipate it. It was necessary that Jesus Christ should himself bear witness to his divinity before Pilate, and be the first martyr thereof, to merit for his disciples the grace to follow his example, and to bear the same witness by their martyrdom. Until then, it was their part to be silent.

“ 31. ¶ And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

Christ here gives an abridgment of the mysteries of his death and resurrection. It was necessary to establish the belief of his divinity before he proposed that of the mystery of the cross. To human understanding, these seem to contradict one another; but it is on this very account that his sufferings are more amiable to us, and that this mystery is more a mystery of faith. Let us be heartily willing to suffer, to be rejected of the world, and to be crucified with Christ, if we desire to rise with him.

“ 32. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.”

Corrupt reason often finds somewhat amiss in the divine conduct. It is always deceived, when it will needs concern itself to judge thereof and to rectify it. A pardonable error this in St. Peter, who had not yet seen the world subjected to God by the cross of Christ, but intolerable in those who fully know the wonders and power of it. Let my reason,

O my God, with an entire submission, continually adore the infinitely wise contrivances of thy sovereign reason.

“ 33. But when he had turned about, and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan : for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.”

Human sentiments are always opposite to the ways of God. Whoever opposes the love of the cross, is a satan. Reason, left to itself, is incapable of receiving the mysteries of faith. Christ looks on his disciples whilst he speaks to St. Peter, to let them know that this lesson concerns them all, and us as well as them. How dangerous a counsellor is natural tenderness in the affairs of salvation ! Men think to preserve nature, to please a friend, and to use a penitent gently, by sparing them in what is troublesome and grievous ; and so they ruin them by a fatal kindness.

“ 34. ¶ And when he had called the people unto him, with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

Self-denial is the abridgment of the morality of the gospel, which concerns every body, and consists in renouncing not only some external things, but the old man entirely ; namely, whatever is irregular and corrupt in the understanding, judgment, memory, will, and affections, and whatever is therein opposite to Jesus Christ, his cross, and his gospel. There is no manner of privilege, no difference in the least, betwixt the pastors and the flock, in relation to the cross and evangelical self-denial. It is for this very

reason that Christ joins the people with his disciples ; and, as it were, to justify his conduct towards St. Peter by the most fundamental part of the gospel.

“ 35. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it ; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”

The love of this present life is contrary to salvation ; a man must lose his life for the sake of Christ in order to find it again in him. The whole tenor of the gospel teaches us, that the contempt of this mortal life is a necessary means to obtain that which is immortal : but how few are convinced by it ? It is not only before tyrants that we ought to wean ourselves from the love of life ; but much more, while we are in the midst of the conveniences and satisfactions of it. The martyrs had only a few days or hours to fight against it, in the sight of torments and death : but Christians, during their whole life, are to maintain their ground against the allurements of pleasure.

“ 36. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?”

All gain is loss when a man does not save his soul. He who possesses all things without God, has nothing. No man is so foolish, as to be willing to purchase an empire at the price of his life ; and yet the world is full of those pretenders to wisdom, who give up their salvation and an immortal life for a vain pleasure, a handful of money, or an inch of land. How much are the greatest conquerors to be pitied, if, whilst intoxicated with their victories and conquests they ravage and lay waste the earth, their own souls

are laid waste by sin and passion, and destroyed to all eternity.

“ 37. Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

A man has but one soul ; and when that is once damned, there is no recovery. Fatal and dreadful experience this, when, after having enjoyed pleasures, riches, and empires a few years, men find, by losing all in a moment, that all is nothing, and that whatever they possessed here is altogether unprofitable for the other life.

“ 38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.”

Men are often too forward rather than otherwise, highly to commend truth amongst those who love and honour it : but to bear witness to it before those who do not favour it at all, is a thing more rare than can be imagined. We do not sufficiently dread this terrible threatening. We may flatter ourselves if we please here below, and by trivial reasons excuse ourselves from giving testimony to the word of Christ, and to himself in his servants : the day of the Lord will disperse all those clouds with which we cover ourselves, and expose to open view the base interests which we shall have preferred to those of God and of his church.

CHAPTER IX.

SECT. I.—*The Transfiguration. The coming of Elias.*

“ 1. AND he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.”

God never promises any thing but he gives an earnest of it even in this life. Christ, by a foretaste of his glory, confirms the belief of his incarnation, strengthens the hope of the resurrection and eternal life, awakens the love of truth, takes off the scandal of the cross, and encourages to the practice of self-denial, and all Christian perfection, wherein he had just now instructed his disciples.

“ 2. ¶ And after six days, Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.”

After the six days of this present life, the eternal Sabbath begins upon the holy mountain of heaven; where Christ entire, consisting of the Head and all the members, of Jesus and the church, shall be perfectly transfigured in glory. O mountain of Sion, city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, church of the first-born who are written in heaven, when will it be that we shall approach thee! When will that glorious transfiguration be accomplished, which shall change this mortal body, and fashion it like unto the glorious body of our blessed Saviour!

“ 3. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow ; so as no fuller on earth can white them.”

The saints in the state of eternity shall become all shining ; they shall be nothing but light and brightness there, both in body and soul, and that without changing their nature. In order to our bearing in our body one day the image of Christ, as the heavenly and spiritual man, we must now bear in it the image of him as the man of mortification and repentance. A true Christian, a true penitent, is, as it were, the fuller of his own flesh, which he takes the greatest pains to cleanse and whiten by mortification, and works of repentance. But what is this purity which grace works in our bodies here on earth, in comparison of that which glory shall work in them in heaven ?

“ 4. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses : and they were talking with Jesus.”

The truth which the prophets attested, published, and honoured with their blood, shall in heaven be in its full light and triumph. Charity, which the law pointed at, longed for, and regulated, shall be there in its fulness and kingdom. There is a perfect agreement betwixt the law and the prophets, betwixt the gospel and the apostles. Every thing in them all, tends to make Jesus Christ known, and God in and by Jesus Christ, to form by faith and charity his mystical body on earth, and to conduct it up into the eternal mountain to be glorified there.

“ 5. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here : and let us make three tabernacles ; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”

The church shall there enjoy the fruit of all its conflicts, a repose which shall never end, and a joy which cannot be expressed. All the saints under their adorable Head, shall be there placed in their proper rank and order, which will make one of the chief beauties of God's house. Happy those who dwell in thy house, O my God ! they will for ever praise thee, and say, " It is good for us to be here." How good, how delectable is it to the brethren of thy Son, to see themselves all re-united with him in unity itself !

" 6. For he wist not what to say ; for they were sore afraid."

The blessed will be there, as it were, intoxicated with the abundance of heavenly delights. How will this change agreeably surprise the children of God, to see themselves on a sudden become, not only like to angels, but even like the Son of God himself ! They, as well as the celestial powers, cannot but be filled with a holy dread and amazement at the sight of the divine Majesty.

" 7. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them : and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son : hear him."

They shall be hid in the secret place of God's presence, overshadowed with that cloud of light wherein God dwells, and shall enter into his bosom, where they shall for ever hear these words, " This is my beloved Son." This is the eternal, essential, and unchangeable truth which thou hast desired, which thou hast diligently sought, and which thou hast at last found. Hear it, not with the ears of thy body, but with thy whole soul ; which shall be

fed, satisfied, and rendered happy thereby to all eternity.

“ 8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.”

Then shall the law, prophecies, knowledge, tongues, ministries, Scriptures, &c. vanish away; and the church shall see nothing any more, save Jesus Christ only in God, and God in him. The sight of the truth is seldom pure in this life. We seldom behold, seek, or love it, unveiled and alone. How many different views, searches, and desires, which are displeasing to it, are generally mixed with it! It is only upon the mountain of the heavenly Sion, that Jesus Christ and truth are seen alone, and loved solely for their own sakes.

“ 9. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.”

Till the resurrection of Christ, no eye had seen, no ear had heard, and no understanding had been able to conceive, the things which God prepares for those who love him. Christ teaches us, not to speak some certain truths at all times, nor to all sorts of persons; but to proportion our confidence according to them. Of the twelve apostles there are but three to whom our blessed Lord manifests his glory before his death; that they may learn from him a holy discretion.

“ 10. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.”

The resurrection is a mystery which is incredible to human understanding, even to those who have been a long time in the school of the Son of God, who have received his instructions, and who have seen his miracles and glory. It is part of the prudence which a prelate ought to have, not to permit those to speak in public concerning the truths and mysteries of religion, who are not as yet thoroughly instructed therein. It is absolutely necessary that the Holy Ghost himself should teach a preacher, by the study of the Scriptures and by prayer, before he can be fit to teach others.

“ 11. ¶ And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?”

Jesus Christ had his Elias, who proclaimed him to the world: he will still have some of the same character throughout all ages, and before his last coming. It is the office of all preachers, pastors, and bishops, incessantly to admonish the faithful, that the day is approaching, that Christ is at the door, and that he will come at an hour when we think not. Grant, O my God, that these Elias’s may want neither zeal nor boldness of speech to awaken sinners, nor grace and unction sufficient to convert them.

“ 12. And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought.”

They who labour in the work of God, and endeavour to re-establish Christian morals in the church, must expect to be treated as Elias, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ himself were. A preacher, who is not disposed to suffer and to be despised, is so far

from restoring all things, that he is in danger of losing himself. He who foretold that Christ was to suffer and to be rejected of the world, has also foretold the same of his ministers: and therefore, if the world spare them, it is perhaps because they spare the world.

“ 13. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.”

We ought not to be surprised at seeing the faithful ministers of Christ persecuted, since there is nothing more clearly foretold in the Scriptures. The world seems to do unto the Elias's, John Baptists, and their successors, whatsoever it listeth; but in truth it does nothing more than that which God is pleased to permit. The wicked, in spite of themselves, accomplish his holy will by the wickedness of their own, procuring by their persecutions, not only the happiness of the saints, but also their own misery. He who foresaw, and has foretold this, has thereby shown that he is absolute Lord in this respect.

SECT. II.—*The Lunatic. Faith. Prayer and Fasting.*

“ 14. ¶ And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. 15. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and, running to him, saluted him.”

A man of God imprints a respect and veneration on the minds of people. Christ often suffers his disciples and ministers to be pressed hard in a dispute, on purpose that they may know the want they

have of him, and may have recourse to prayer with the greater earnestness. He sometimes comes to their assistance in a very surprising manner, to the end that his own hand may evidently appear, and that they may not give that to man which is due only to God.

“ 16. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them ? 17. And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit ; 18. And where-soever he taketh him, he teareth him ; and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away : and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out ; and they could not.”

When Jesus Christ absents himself from us, we are nothing. A minister must not expect to have always success in the conversion of sinners. Sometimes the greatest care, application, and talents, signify nothing ; because God designs to effect the thing by himself, and to make his ministers more fit for his work, by making them more humble. Children diseased and possessed, are an evident proof of original sin ; because, under a just God, none are miserable unless they deserve it. Bodily possession is a consequence and emblem of that of the soul, and of the dominion which the devil exercises over the heart by means of the passions.

“ 19. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation ! how long shall I be with you ? how long shall I suffer you ? Bring him unto me.”

Let us imitate, on occasion, the obedience and charity of Christ, which detained him in the world, though the incredulity and contradiction thereof were

a continual trouble to him. How intolerable soever some ministers and pastors, by reason of their want of faith, and their other defects, may possible be, yet Christ ceases not mildly to bear with them, to continue with them, according to his promise, to work by their ministry, and even to produce by them extraordinary effects. Whoever finds his endeavours ineffectual on souls enslaved to sin and the devil, ought to conduct them to Christ, by addressing himself to him in more fervent prayers, or by procuring them the assistance of some others of his servants.

“ 20. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed, foaming.”

The devil redoubles his assaults, when he sees that Christ is ready to wrest a soul out of his hands. A passionate and headstrong sinner, who hardens himself, and obstinately withstands the admonitions and endeavours of a charitable pastor, is much more to be deplored than this miserable wretch, who is but an emblem of the other. There are few passions but what are able to raise in the soul more violent agitations, than those which in this possessed person give us so much horror.

“ 21. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.”

From the very moment that man begins to bear a body of sin, he begins to be subject to the tyranny of the devil. He gains his dominion either over the soul or the body, according as the will opens to him the gate of the heart, or as God gives him power over

the body, sometimes to punish sinners, sometimes to exercise and sanctify the just.

“ 22. And oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him : but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.”

The mischief which the devil does not do, evidently shows, that what he does is by the permission of a will superior to his. It is this will which we ought to fear, not the devil, who is only the minister and instrument hereof. There is nothing which he would not employ to our destruction, if the creatures were entirely subject to his power. It is of great importance not to rely too much upon our not having any inclination to some particular sin, and being well disposed to the contrary virtue. The devil knows how to deceive us and change our minds, and to make us pass from fire to water, and from water to fire. It is upon the power, mercy, and grace of Christ, that we must altogether depend.

“ 23. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”

Faith is a very great treasure, since nothing is refused to it: but it belongs only to him who gives all the rest, to give us faith also. Yes, Lord, all things are possible to him, to whom thou renderest all things possible by working them in him. Faith, the use, the increase, and the reward of it—all is a gift of thy pure bounty.

“ 24. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

The humble man is himself distrustful of his^r faith, and prays without ceasing for an increase of it. It

is often so weak, that it scarce deserves the name. Who amongst us has, after the example of this person, made use of prayers and tears to obtain it? An humble acknowledgment of the imperfection of our faith, and of our other defects, is capable of making up every thing which is wanting to us; or rather, nothing is wanting to him who has humility.

“ 25. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.”

Those who love not either to speak or to hear of God, are possessed with a dumb and deaf spirit, from which Christ alone can deliver them. Happy are they into whom he never enters any more! What would not God grant to a faith which is perfect, since even to an imperfect one he grants much more than it asks. Jesus Christ never speaks to the devil but with threats, as to a slave. There are no measures to be kept, where there is no longer the least hope of reconciliation or charity.

“ 26. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.”

The sinner suffers strange convulsions, when he endeavours to forsake his inveterate habits; and especially a young man who has continued under them from his childhood. To speak to him concerning renouncing his passions, is almost the same thing as to deprive him of his life. A young person possessed by sin, is a very proper instrument of the devil for all manner of wickedness; and therefore he omits nothing in order to secure him to himself. Such a person

is dead to the world, and the world to him, when once he is thoroughly delivered from this calamity.

“ 27. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up ; and he arose.”

What a happiness is it, when, amidst the pangs and struggles of conversion, a sinner meets with an enlightened guide, a charitable hand to lift him up in his dejection, to comfort him under his pains, and to lead him into the ways of God ! But what docility, what respect, what gratitude, does not the invisible hand of Christ, which is concealed under this visible one, deserve ? May I, O Lord, have neither motion nor action, but by the guidance of this adorable hand, which thou hast been pleased to extend even unto me !

“ 28. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out ? 29. And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

Nothing is more prevalent against the devil than prayer and fasting. Priests must make use of them in converting sinners, if they desire to succeed therein. Those sinners, whom God or the church delivers sometimes unto Satan, for the punishment of some very heinous sins, cannot be set at liberty but by abundance of groans and mortifications. He who, for his crimes, is once put into the hands of the executioner, has need of very powerful solicitations to obtain his pardon ; and, with regard to God, such are only to be found in prayer and penitential exercises.

SECT. III.—*The Passion foretold. The First the Servant of all.*

“ 30. ¶ And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it. 31. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.”

The charity of Jesus Christ towards his disciples induces him to comfort them with the hopes of his resurrection, at the same time that he afflicts them with the prediction of his death. When we cannot avoid giving affliction to our neighbour, we ought to give him comfort by the hopes of future happiness. We must prepare him for a favourable reception of ungrateful and mortifying truths, by accompanying them with others more proper to raise and support the mind.

“ 32. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.”

The spirit cannot understand what the flesh is unwilling to suffer. This seed, which Christ seems unprofitably to cast into a barren soil, will bring forth fruit in due time. We must not give over instructing, how dull soever the understandings of men are as to heavenly truths: the Spirit of God can open them, as he opened those of the apostles. We ought to be ashamed of that unreasonable bashfulness, which makes us choose rather to continue ignorant than to discover our ignorance. Nothing but humility can secure us from it.

“ 33. ¶ And he came to Capernaum: and, being

in the house, he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? 34. But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest."

How subtle is the poison of ambition! how difficult is it for a man to preserve himself from it in this life! Humility is peaceable, and always ready to give place; pride is always disputing about preference. If we look narrowly into the world, we shall find that this is what most generally reigns in all states and conditions whatsoever. Few people are heartily willing to be below others; they find as much difficulty almost to bear an equality; and much the greatest number think of nothing but gaining a superiority. Who would imagine that ambition could take hold of persons who had forsaken all; and that the apostolical college should not be exempt from it? In short, every body is subject to it, and nobody is willing to own it.

"35. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."

True greatness consists in renouncing greatness itself. A man becomes a slave to it, when once he desires it; he is above it, whenever he despises it. The primacy or first place in humility, is the only one to which we are permitted to aspire. To dispute with secular persons which should be the greatest, is a thing very opposite to an ecclesiastical spirit. The only thing of which a minister of Christ ought to be ambitious, is to be the last of all. Humility must not be an idle virtue, but a virtue useful to our neighbour. It places its chief joy, not only in being

below all, but even in serving all. For true charity is humble, and true humility is charitable.

SECT. IV.—*Children. He who is not against Christ is for him. A cup of water.*

“36. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,”

The character, and even the emblem of humility is dear to Christ. Who does not envy the good fortune of this child? Who would not have wished to be in his place? But it is far more advantageous to be embraced in the arms of his love, than in those of his flesh. The greater our simplicity and humility are, the greater share shall we have in his tenderness and affection.

“37. Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.”

The education of children is one part of that which is here so forcibly recommended by Jesus Christ. Those who have the spirit of simplicity, humility, and Christian childhood, deserve to be most regarded and assisted by virtuous people, because they are treated worst by the world. We ought to look upon Christ and his Father as present in those whom we serve and assist. The recommendation of some great person is more sought after and considered by men, than that of Christ. Whoever has faith judges after a very different manner.

“38. ¶ And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us; and we forbade him, because he followeth not us.”

That which John here does, is an example of an indiscreet zeal for the interests of Christ. The most holy persons have sometimes occasion to secure themselves from secret emulations. We very easily mingle our own interests with those of God; and our vanity uses the glory of his name only as a veil. A preacher sometimes imagines that his only desire is, that men should follow Christ, and adhere to his word; and it is himself whom he desires they should follow, and to whom he is very glad to find them adhere. John has fewer imitators of that perfect freedom from self-interest, which he had after the descent of the Holy Ghost, than he has of this defect in his state of imperfection. A man willingly approves the good which is done by others, when he loves good for its own sake, and God for his.

“39. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.”

Christ suffers many things in his church which are done without his mission; but he makes them contribute to the establishment of his kingdom. Whatever reason we may have to fear that some persons will not persevere in goodness, we must notwithstanding suffer them to continue their endeavours, when they appear to be any ways useful. God himself authorizes such persons, since it is he who performs the good in them. It is to make the world promote and carry on God’s work, for a man to engage worldly people to do good, or to favour the church. And this is sometimes even a beginning of their salvation.

“40. For he that is not against us is on our part.”

Why should any one suspect evil in the heart,

when in outward appearance there is nothing but what is good? It is very much for the interests of God and his truth, not to have some certain persons for declared enemies; it is imprudence not to preserve and improve this advantage.

“ 41. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, He shall not lose his reward.”

The very smallest services done to our neighbour shall be rewarded. The intention and design which we have of doing them to Christ in his members or ministers, does wonderfully enhance the value of them before God. They often say in the world, ‘ Such a person has recommended him to me:’ but when does any one say, ‘ God, Christ, or the gospel, recommends this poor afflicted wretch, this business, this oppressed person:’ ‘ Such a one belongs to Jesus Christ, I owe him, not only a cup of water, but my assistance, my protection, and if there be occasion, even my life itself?’

SECT. V.—*Offence. The never-dying Worm and unquenchable Fire. Salt and Peace.*

“ 42. And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.”

A man offends, or gives occasion of scandal to his brother, his own family, and the church, not only by giving a bad example, but also in suffering that in them which it is in his power to remove; or by not giving a good example, when he can, and ought.

Whoever refuses to bear this light yoke of charity, shall be oppressed with the weight of God's justice, and cast headlong into hell. He who can excuse himself in not having a cup of water to give his brother, cannot excuse himself from giving him a good example, or at least from not giving him a bad one. This is the most indispensable duty of Christian charity.

"43. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; 44. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

How short and slight is the pleasure of a criminal touch, and it is purchased at the price of an eternal and inconceivable pain! He to whom the management of the public money becomes a hinderance of salvation, or an occasion of sin, ought he to deliberate, whether he shall cut off this hand or not? Every use of the hand, every employment, state, and kind of work, whereby a livelihood is gained, are so many hands which are to be cut off, when they are inconsistent with salvation.

"45. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched;"

The cutting off of the foot, is the breaking off all commerce with the world by a holy retirement, whenever it becomes necessary to salvation. To quit the occasions of falling, is not a counsel of perfection, but a necessary duty; since salvation depends upon it.

"46. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

Who can conceive the torment of this gnawing worm, namely, of the eternal reproach of conscience, when a man shall reflect upon the graces and mercies of God which he has despised, and on the preference he has made of the shadow of a momentary happiness, before a substantial and eternal good, which is God himself?

“ 47. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire;”

What precautions do we not take to avoid an infectious air, and to prevent a contagious distemper from spreading? How much greater reason have we to shun those persons who are to us an occasion of sin, were they, on the account of their advice, protection, and assistance, as dear to us as our hands, our feet, and our eyes? How much more still ought we to cut off all criminal, unprofitable, and dangerous use of our senses, our mind, and our body?

“ 48. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”

These words repeated three times, are as so many admonitions, to avoid the last, great, general, and eternal excommunication, which will separate the sinner from all happiness, and overwhelm him with all internal and external miseries, denoted here by the worm and the fire. Let us hearken to this wholesome advice of our blessed Saviour, while as yet this worm may be crushed by the contrition of our heart, and this fire extinguished by the tears of our repentance.

“ 49. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.”

See here the greatness, multiplicity, and eternity of the pains of the damned. They suffer without being able to die, they are burned without ever being consumed, they are sacrificed without being sanctified, and salted with the fire of hell, as eternal victims of the divine justice. We must of necessity be sacrificed to God after one manner or another in the state of eternity: and we have now the choice, either of the unquenchable fire of his justice, or of the everlasting flame of his love.

" 50. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltiness, wherewith will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

The salt of Christian wisdom, which consists in having a relish only of heavenly things, ought to be very quick and lively in priests. It belongs to them to impart this relish to others: but if they have once lost it, how difficultly is it recovered! This relish and this wisdom seldom return, when the relish and wisdom of the world have taken their place. True wisdom produces humility, and humility preserves peace. O Jesus, eternal wisdom, wholesome salt of the soul, pattern of Christian humility, and source of true peace, vouchsafe to give me a relish of God, humility and peace; preserve in me whatever comes from thee, and consume the corruption which proceeds from myself.

CHAPTER X.

SECT. I.—*Marriage indissoluble.*

“ 1. AND he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judea by the farther side of Jordan : and the people resort unto him again ; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.”

A true pastor is never weary of instructing his people. He is always ready to communicate himself; because the treasure of his heart is always full of the truths of salvation. His known charity causes people to seek and apply themselves to him, and this search and concourse invite and solicit his charity. Kindle, O Lord, this double zeal, both in the pastors and in the sheep !

“ 2. ¶ And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife ? tempting him.”

Thus some good pastors, intent on feeding the flock of God, find themselves opposed by pragmatical persons, and their sheep disturbed with contentious and malicious questions. Every age has its Pharisees, of whom the devil makes use to tempt the pastors, and whom God permits to do it, in order to prove the faithful. Lord, do not permit their trial to be above their strength ; and vouchsafe to be thyself their strength and their light !

“ 3. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you ?”

In order to free the church from the maxims of corrupt morality, it is sufficient to refer the followers

thereof to the holy Scripture: it is by this divine word that we must examine all questions which arise in the church. The way to puzzle and confound innovators, is to oblige them to explain and prove their opinions by holy writ.

“ 4. And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.”

A loose casuist generally wants either knowledge or sincerity. This conduct of the Pharisees is but too frequently imitated, who, being called upon to produce the primitive law published by Moses, “ He shall cleave to his wife,” suppress it, to insist upon a doctrine which was only tolerated, and to fix upon a dispensation of this law, which had been extorted, as it were, by force. Men often substitute, in the room of the holy law of the gospel, a toleration of some things, which corruption of manners has introduced contrary to the gospel itself.

“ 5. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept:”

A precept not to divorce, but to write a bill concerning it, which might allay the warmth of a sudden desire, and give at least time to consider more calmly of it. There is much more reason for men to humble themselves, than to boast on the account of dispensations, when they are granted only “ for the hardness of their hearts.” God does by no means authorize every thing which he tolerates; and he frequently permits a less evil, that a greater may be avoided. It is absolutely necessary to distinguish in the Scripture that which God commands, that which he counsels, that which he expressly permits, and that which, out of his infinite patience, he only tolerates or suffers.

“ 6. But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female.”

In the defence of the truth and morality of the gospel, we must, after Christ’s example, not wander from the subject, but always keep close to the natural order, to the divine institution, and to the sacred text; and run things back to their source and original.

“ 7. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; 8. And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.”

Marriage betwixt one man and one woman, carries in it singularity and inseparable society, friendship and inviolable fidelity, unity and unalterable community. What weighty reasons, then, ought there to be for proceeding to a divorce, after so express a commandment of God, and so forcible a reason laid down? For whose sake shall a man and woman part, if they are not permitted to do it for the sake of father or mother?

“ 9. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

There are four sorts of marriage which cannot be dissolved, whereof the first is an emblem of the rest: betwixt man and woman, betwixt the Word and the human nature, betwixt Christ and his church, and betwixt God and his elect in heaven. It is a shameful perfidiousness in civil life, to break off a friendship which is within the verge of our power; it is a crime in religion to violate the conjugal friendship, of which God is the author, Jesus Christ the pattern, and the Holy Ghost the bond; and which the end of marriage, the education of children, the peace of families, and the public good render necessary.

“ 10. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. 11. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. 12. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.”

The union of marriage, honours and resembles that of Christ with his church, which he will never forsake to take another, as she will never forsake him. God suffered divorce in the synagogue, to signify the future repudiation thereof; he re-established the indissolubility of marriage in the church, to show that she is the inseparable spouse of Jesus Christ. It is upon this account that the adulterer does, by his lewdness and injustice, particularly dishonour Christ and his church, whose mysterious figure he so shamefully violates and abuses.

SECT. II.—*Little Children blessed.*

“ 13. ¶ And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.”

Children are the fruit of marriage; their Christian education, and the care of presenting them to Christ, that they may become his members, is the end thereof. They are an unhappy fruit, if they are not presented to our blessed Saviour, and if he does not touch them by blessing them, and uniting them to himself by his Spirit of adoption, in order to make them members of his body.

“ 14. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children

to come unto me, and forbid them not : for of such is the kingdom of God."

Nothing is more acceptable to God than great simplicity, how much soever it is despised by the world. It is to the simple and sincere that God communicates himself, them he vouchsafes to honour with a near access to his majesty, and for them he designs his kingdom. The Christian childhood consists in having no more pride, impurity, resentment, craft, ambition, covetousness, and knowledge of evil, than children. It is this which renders us conformable, gives us admission, and unites us to Jesus Christ in his kingdom. What is here said is not by way of counsel, but it shows the absolute necessity of being such, at least in some degree, in order to be saved. It is Jesus Christ who says this ;—can we entertain any manner of doubt concerning it ?

" 15. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

To fall back into childhood is the decay of reason, and the greatest humiliation of man : but there is another childhood, which is the glory of a reasonable creature, and the perfection of reason itself ; and this is to have the docility of a child in respect of the truths of the gospel. A child which is incapable of resisting grace, and is, as it were, a *rasa tabula* before God, affords a lively representation of that which grace is able to effect, even in the heart of an old sinner. If this grace were not all-powerful, who could ever hope for dispositions so contrary to the pride of man ? Who could aspire to this kingdom ? " Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law."

“ 16. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.”

What care ought not men to take of children, for whom Christ expresses so great tenderness, whom he blesses, and takes under his own protection ! The blessing of the Almighty cannot possibly be ineffectual, since he blesses none but those he loves, and since his love produces the good effect which he requires. If children were incapable of grace and sanctification, what good could Christ do them ? The church imitates her Head in admitting them to baptism, and opening her bosom to them. Heresy inhumanly rejects those whom Christ embraces, by neglecting to baptize them.

SECT. III.—*The rich young Man. The danger of Riches.*

“ 17. ¶ And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ?”

How advantageous is it, frequently to ask at the feet of Christ what we must do in order to our salvation ! It is an excellent practice, provided we perform it as we ought. He alone is capable of showing us the way to heaven, being himself the way : he alone is incapable of deceiving us, since he is the truth : and he alone is worthy to conduct us to eternal life, being himself that very life.

“ 18. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good ? there is none good but one, that is, God.”

If the faith of the heart be not answerable to the confession of the mouth, the humility to the works,

and the purity of the intention to the fervency of the action, a man may run to Christ, humble himself before him, and ask the best things in the world of him, without becoming at all better thereby. In order to pray after a truly Christian manner, it is necessary for us to be thoroughly convinced of our own misery, and that God only being the fulness of all goodness, it is through him only that we can become good.

“ 19. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.”

The commandments of God afford us sufficient instruction : it is often nothing but curiosity which desires other lights. The law of God makes known his will ; and it is by conforming ourselves thereto, that we partake of his goodness and holiness. Let thy law, O my God, be continually the rule of my behaviour and actions !

“ 20. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.”

Under how great obligations to God does that person lie, whom he prepossesses from his youth with the love of his law ? It is very dangerous for him not to have all the thankfulness which he ought for such a blessing, or to attribute that to himself which is due only to God. Youth passed in innocence is a very rare and precious gift : but it often happens, that when a man has not known sin, he does not sufficietly know from whence virtue comes.

“ 21. Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest : go thy way,

sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me."

God cannot love any thing in us but only his own gifts; he alone can perfect those which he has bestowed upon us. It is sometimes of great advantage to us, for him not to do this very soon, to the end that we may know at least, by the difficulty of what remains to be done, that what we have done already did not proceed from ourselves, but was a gift of God. If there be any one irregular inclination in the heart, this is the very thing which God requires us to sacrifice to him, without which our salvation is in great danger.

" 22. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions."

Abundance of persons serve God with cheerfulness, until he requires them to sacrifice that which they love to him. A man thinks he loves God above all things, when at the same time, without being sensible of it, he loves a little money or some trifles more than God. Can we look upon riches as an advantage, when they are certainly an obstacle, either to salvation, or at least to that perfection which God requires of us? This young man had been perhaps a saint, if he had been poor: so true is it, that it is oftentimes a misfortune to be rich.

" 23. ¶ And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"

Let Jesus Christ threaten the rich, and decry riches ever so much; the rich can by no means be persuaded to be afraid of their condition, nor the

poor not to envy it. Whoever will not believe wisdom itself, and the author of salvation in the business of salvation, is resolved to shut his eyes and to perish. That which makes the danger the greater, is, that men are either least, or rather not at all afraid, in that state wherein they have most reason to be so. It is therefore no other than to turn our backs upon the kingdom of God, for us to have no other design, but how to raise what the world calls a fortune, and to heap up riches upon riches.

“ 24. And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God !”

The poor are sooner astonished at these words, than the rich are so much as moved by them : the reason is, because men see the danger of others better than their own. It is much easier for a man to be contented without those things which he has not, than to disengage himself from those which he possesses, and not to trust in them. The poor may find a sufficient ground of trust and confidence in their poverty, since the kingdom of God is theirs : but the rich have reason to tremble in the midst of their riches. Whoever finds in them his rest, his joy, and his happiness, never thinks of seeking for these things in God. And there lies the greatest misery.

“ 25. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 26. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved ?”

Experience shows but too plainly, how difficult it is to root out of the heart the desire of perishing things. To do this is a greater miracle than to remove a mountain. The wealth of a covetous man is like food incorporated and changed into the substance of his heart: to take away the former, is to tear out the latter. He alone can do this who has the heart of the covetous person in his hand, and can take out his stony heart, and give him one of flesh. The world is full of such as say one to another, “Who then can be saved?” and yet live as if it were the easiest thing imaginable.

“27. And Jesus, looking upon them, saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”

It is the comfort of the humble, that their salvation is in the hands of God; and it is the blindness of the proud, that they would have theirs in their own. A true Christian is not at all alarmed to find here, that without grace his salvation is impossible; because he knows, that God can do every thing for him, and that he himself can do all things in God through Jesus Christ. Yes, O my God, to thee it does belong to work my salvation, because thou canst do all things in me; and to me to humble myself under thy almighty hand, because I can do nothing but by thee.

SECT. IV.—*An hundred-fold promised. Persecutions. The Passion foretold.*

“28. ¶ Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.”

That man forsakes a great deal, who, having but
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little, leaves it all for the sake of God, and desires nothing but him. It is a small thing to forsake external goods, if we do not forsake what is truly ours, our will and flesh, in sacrificing them to God by mortification. It is something indeed to strip ourselves; but if we design to follow Christ beyond the sea of this present world, we must, by strength of arm, cut our passage through the waves to that place where he expects us; that is, we must renounce and do violence to ourselves, in imitation of our head and pattern.

“ 29. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, 30. But he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.”

Who could believe, that he who leaves his kindred and estate, that he may not be deficient in faith, truth, and righteousness, and in that perfection which God requires of him, is rewarded even in this life? It is Jesus Christ who says it: it is therefore a matter of faith. One single degree of grace, which is a thousand times more valuable than all which a man can leave for the sake of God, causes him to find an hundred-fold. Whoever can truly say, that his faith staggers not at this article, and that he is ready to follow Christ at the expense of all, what may he not justly expect from God! It is very pleasant to serve a master, who in this world makes his servants rich in poverty, full of joy in forsaking all things, and

happy in the midst of persecutions ; whereas worldly masters cannot secure their favourites from being miserable even in the midst of riches, pleasures, and the greatest prosperity.

“ 31. But many that are first shall be last ; and the last first.”

What is here said is commonly seen in times of persecution. A great sinner, who shows himself faithful to God, makes amends for his past infidelities, and rises even to the glory of martyrdom ; whilst a virtuous person who gives way, loses the fruit of all his good works. It is of the last importance for a man to be faithful to his duty on some singular occasion. This is often a decisive stroke, and causes very great alterations. How much greater still is that which is made at the hour of death betwixt a proud rich man and an humble beggar, a worldly person and a true Christian ?

“ 32. ¶ And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem ; and Jesus went before them : and they were amazed ; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him,”

All nature trembles in a man, when God obliges him to take the way of the cross. Christ goes forward therein, with a firm and even pace, and with a true courage. He who hazards his life in hopes of a better fortune, exposes it only because he hopes not to lose it, and is but the more fond of it on this account ; as a covetous person is really the fonder of riches, the more he exposes to the hazard of gaming, on the prospect of greater gain. True courage consists in the contempt of this present life through the

hopes of that which is eternal: and this contempt is so much the greater, the more sure a man is of losing it, as Jesus Christ and the martyrs were.

“ 33. Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: 34. And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him; and the third day he shall rise again.”

These two verses contain an abridgment of the passion of the Son of God. His admirable constancy at the sight of his sufferings, does not proceed from insensibility or stupidity, but from his immutable affection towards his Father; and his inviolable adherence to his will. Let us, after the example of Christ, support ourselves under the prospect of the evils of this life, with the hopes of that which is to come. The exact accomplishment of this prediction in all its parts, is an invincible proof both of the divinity of Christ, and of the religion which he has established.

SECT. V.—*Zebedee's children. The cup before the Glory.*

“ 35. ¶ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire.”

Such is the blindness of carnal man, that he would have God’s will directed by his own. Worldly men, not altogether destitute of faith, are not for going directly contrary to the will of God; but they would fain have his designs fall in with their own, and

through this earnest desire, they act at last as if it were so. It is but a bad disposition for prayer, to begin it with prescribing to God what he ought to give us.

“ 36. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?”

He knew better than they that which was in their hearts; but it was proper that they should discover it themselves, in the presence of the rest, to the end that all might be instructed and set right. He seems disposed to grant them every thing, on purpose that they may have such trust and confidence in him, as to dissemble and hide nothing from him.

“ 37. They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.”

How little does man know wherein the kingdom of Christ consists, and the ways which lead thereto! Who is there who does not perceive in his heart some degree at least of this irregular desire? It is injustice and pride to covet that which does not belong to us; and it is the spirit of the world. There men think of nothing but how to place themselves, without troubling themselves at all to consider whether they injure others, or whether they deserve that which they desire. Ambition supplies the place of merit; and every thing is just when it is advantageous.

“ 38. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

Ambition is blind, and often knows neither what it does, nor what it desires; because it professes to

consult neither reason nor faith. We think of nothing but human greatness, because we have no perfect knowledge of the true. The love of sufferings and of the cross, ought to be the measure of our hopes and desires. No other way leads to glory but that of mortification and the cross. There are inward mortifications, which pierce the heart, expressed here by the cup which is to be drank of; and there are outward, denoted by the baptism. We must have no small degree of faith and of the love of God, to look upon these things as no other than an agreeable and delicious draught, or as a refreshing and wholesome bath.

“ 39. And they say unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized :”

The ambitious person finds nothing difficult, provided he can but raise himself. He easily presumes upon that which he cannot perform, to obtain that which he cannot deserve. It was but a moment ago, and these men were seized with fear and amazement at the bare sight of the way to Jerusalem : but one passion weakens another, and, like a burning fever, supplies a man with fresh strength and courage.

“ 40. But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give ; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”

Jesus Christ is a priest, or rather a high-priest, who knows not what it is to prefer his friends or relations upon carnal motives, or to satisfy their ambition. He makes them partakers of his cross : but as to glory, he refers them for that to his Father.

As the cross is the only way whereby we can arrive at glory ; to promise a persevering love for the former, is no other than to promise the latter. Grant, O Jesus, that we may both live and die with thee under the banner of the cross.

SECT. VI.—*Imperiousness forbid.*

“ 41. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.”

The ambition of clergymen is a great scandal in the church, and is frequently an occasion of emulations, enmities, divisions, schisms, and wars ; of all which the displeasure and indignation of the apostles give us an imperfect shadow and resemblance. If apostles, trained up with so much care in the school of charity and humility, notwithstanding are not free from this vice ; what effects will not ambition produce in souls, wholly immersed in flesh and blood, which have no motion but from their passions, no law but that of their own desires ?

“ 42. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, exercise lordship over them ; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. 43. But so shall it not be among you : but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister ;”

Observe here the spirit and rule of ecclesiastical government : much humility, instruction, and condescension ; no dominion, imperiousness, or harshness. Men strangely forget themselves, when, in a ministry appointed only for the sake of heaven, they are for contending with the great ones of the earth in haughtiness and grandeur. It is very difficult to

support equally the double character of a spiritual pastor and a temporal prince; and to join humility with grandeur, meekness with dominion, and the constant application of a pastor to the duties of his function with the care of secular affairs.

“ 44. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.”

The greatest prelate in the church is he who is most conformable to the example of Christ by humility, charity, and continual attendance on his flock, and who looks upon himself as a servant to the children of God. We do not know what it is to serve one single soul for the sake of God, in the spirit of the holy servitude of Christ. It is something far more honourable, than proudly to command whole nations, and to govern empires. God requires nothing more of his chief ministers than that which men do every day in order to raise themselves; which is, to become the servants of all: but the one is a servitude of charity, the other of concupiscence.

“ 45. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

To serve and to die; this is all which Christ came into the world to do. There is no slave who serves his master as this divine Master served his slaves. After such an example as this, and under such a head, a Christian, and much more a clergyman, should not reflect, without some confusion, upon the necessity under which he lies of being served by others. It is good to dispense as much as possible with the service of others, and to exact none but after such a manner as is conformable to the spirit of the gospel,

and to the example of the Prince of pastors. A man ought continually to serve or minister in the work of salvation, as our blessed Lord did; and to spare neither his health nor his life to contribute to the saving of one soul: this is a duty belonging to the pastoral office, upon which he ought to reckon before he undertakes it. O sovereign Pastor of souls, renew in thy church the spirit and zeal of thy sacerdotal servitude, so little known, and much less put in practice.

SECT. VII.—*The Blind Man of Jericho cured.*

“ 46. ¶ And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples, and a great number of people, blind Bartimeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway-side begging.”

In the cure of this blind man, let us reflect upon man delivered from blindness of heart, indigence, and impotency, by the mysteries of Christ’s life. Blindness and indigence are not always found together in the blind of body; but they are never asunder in the spiritually blind. Faith is at the same time both the eye and life of the soul; and truth is the light and bread of the heart. O eternal truth! O heavenly bread! grant that I may be always sensible how much I stand in need of thee, that I may know thee, go to thee, and feed upon thee.

“ 47. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.”

That which a sinner ought to observe in the cure of his soul, is, 1. To know his own blindness, and to be willing to be delivered from it. 2. To have re-

course to the sovereign Physician. 3. To pray to him with fervency. 4. To trust only in his mercy. The cure is far advanced, when once a man begins to cry out after his deliverer and physician: he is already freed from a great part of his misery, when he is become so sensible as to have recourse to mercy. It is thou, O God of mercies, who hast prevented me in my blindness, and taught me to call upon thee, and to lay before thee my misery.

“ 48. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”

The sinner in his conversion ought, 5. Not to hearken to the world, nor to those who would discourage or divert him from his design; but to pray with the greater earnestness. This blind man is already well enlightened. He knows that the opportunities of recovering sight do not present themselves every day, and that therefore he must not let them slip. Truth does not always come to us a second time: he who lets it pass away from him, is not sure of finding it again. We sometimes hazard all by not adhering to it at first with constancy and perseverance.

“ 49. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.”

The sinner in his conversion ought, 6. To have a man of God to conduct him to Christ, and encourage him under his weakness. What joy and comfort is it to a penitent, when he sees that the divine mercy is moved by his misery; that it stands still, as it were, on his account, and hears his prayers! Hope

is firmly established in the heart by prayer, and supplies a man with courage to go to God when he calls him in that manner which is always effectual.

“ 50. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.”

He ought, 7. To cast away immediately all outward impediments which retard the effect of his resolutions. 8. To obey him who speaks to him on the part of God ; and to rise up in order to go near his Saviour, by walking in the way of good works and of his commandments. 9. To run to him without delay, and with an ardent faith. The blind man stands before Jesus without seeing him, yet he believes and hopes in him ; which gives us a representation of this life, wherein our cure is wrought under the obscurity of faith. We shall see this adorable truth, which is at present veiled from our sight, when once our cure shall be perfected, our eyes opened, and the darkness of faith changed into the light of glory.

“ 51. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee ? The blind man said unto him, Lord, * that I might receive my sight.” [** Fr. Cause me to see.*]

The sinner in his conversion ought, 10. To forget all other wants, and to mention none but those of his soul in begging mercy. That mercy which the blind man here asks is, that Christ, by his almighty power, would be pleased to work a cure in him, and give him eyes capable of seeing. In like manner, that which every one, who prays to God as he ought, asks in proportion, is the operation of his grace in the heart. Observe here the perfect agreement of grace

with free-will. God, by his all-powerful will, works upon the will of man, which is denoted by these expressions, “that I should do unto thee;”—“cause me to see.” The will of man gives its consent thereto, wills it, and asks for it, signified by these words, “What wilt thou?” “Lord, cause me to see.”

“52. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”

In the last place, the sinner, after he has received his cure, observing the rules of justice, ought to be full of acknowledgment, and to follow Christ by imitating him throughout the whole course of this life. This blind man’s faith made him whole, and saved him; but it was the Saviour himself who gave him this faith. The Scripture, and Christ himself, speak both of cures and of dispositions which qualify for them, because these dispositions are no less a gift of God than the cures themselves, and it is a matter of faith that he is the author of both. My God, I acknowledge with joy, that thou canst not crown anything in me except thy own gifts; and that I have nothing to offer to thee but what I have received from thee.

CHAPTER XI.

SECT. I.—*Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem.*

“1. AND when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples,”

Christ, as the victim of God, comes to present himself at the place of sacrifice. This is not the

action of a mere man, to go thus calmly, in cold blood, to deliver himself up to his enemies and to meet certain death. It is thus, O Jesus, that thou introducest into the world a new philosophy, which consists in the folly of the cross, the contempt of life, and the desire of death. Lord, let this spirit of sacrifice fill the hearts of Christians, and make them become true victims.

“ 2. And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him.”

This colt is a figure of the Gentiles, a people without any yoke or law, to whom Christ was to send his apostles: and this action denotes the calling of them, which we see continually fulfilled, even in our own days, by missionaries and bishops truly apostolical. God sometimes sends preachers very far, for a small number of his elect, who have no knowledge of him, and are tied fast with the cords of sin, and have never borne the yoke of any law.

“ 3. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.”

The need which the Lord declares he has of this colt is, that he may show himself to the people as the true paschal victim which is necessary for them; that he may prefigure the triumph of his grace over all nations; and teach all prelates, after his example, to retain the marks of modesty and humility in the midst of the splendour of their dignity, and to renounce all excess by yielding to necessity.

“ 4. And they went their way, and found the colt

tied by the door without, in a place where two ways met ; and they loose him."

It is no small proof of the faith of these disciples, who were as yet imperfect, to expose themselves to the insults of men, in obedience to their Master. They run the risk of being counted no better than thieves : there are, therefore, some occasions on which it is necessary for a man to hazard his reputation, as well as his life, in order to perform the will of God.

" 5. And certain of them that stood there, said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt ? 6. And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded : and they let them go."

Nothing resists the word of the God-man, nor the faith and obedience of a faithful disciple. Let us learn to avoid all arguing and disputing, whenever God commands us something above our strength ; and to put our whole confidence in the power of his will, which can do all things. He accustoms his apostles to see, that the wills of men are less in their own power than in that of God ; and that his word is almighty, even in the mouth of his ministers ; to the end, that men may believe them.

" 7. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him ; and he sat upon him."

It is the duty of a priest to bring those souls to Christ, whom, by his power, he has loosed from their sins ; to spare nothing within his capacity to cover and secure them from the malice of the devil and the world ; and to dispose them to bear the yoke of Christ and his gospel. This is the way to make them bear a part in the triumphs of our blessed Saviour. Let us carry Christ in our hearts, and suffer ourselves to

be guided by him in the road to the heavenly Jerusalem, if we desire ever to arrive there with him. But let us remember, that it will be in vain for us to undertake to do this, unless he himself vouchsafe to carry and support us by his grace.

“ 8. And many spread their garments in the way; and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way.”

A man may justly be said to lay all at and under the feet of Christ, when he looks upon all the things of this world with contempt, and freely parts with them to win Christ. The shortest and safest way to the heavenly Jerusalem is, for men to strip themselves of their possessions, (represented here by garments,) and to trample under foot all worldly hopes, (denoted by the branches of the trees,) in order to give reception to Christ, and to make him triumph in their hearts by apostolical and evangelical perfection.

“ 9. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: 10. Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.”

Whatever was done before the incarnation, and whatever has happened since, was all designed to be subservient only to Christ and to his glory. He cometh in the name of his Father; he is the true David; and his kingdom is a kingdom of suffering upon earth, and of glory in heaven. When shall we behold this glorious kingdom, which the true Israelites expect, for which the children of God daily pray to their heavenly Father? when shall we sing a Hosanna, to be followed with an eternal Alleluja?

“ 11. And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the even-tide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.”

Christ teaches kings and conquerors to lay down at the foot of the altar all the glory wherewith they are encircled. They ought ultimately to refer to God all the praises which are given them; to dedicate to him all their grandeur; frequently to pour out their hearts before him in the house of prayer, and to offer them up to him, in order to empty and purify them from all the vanity which praise is apt to inspire, and to beg of him the grace not to suffer themselves to be poisoned therewith. It is neither a wandering mind nor curiosity which causes Christ “ to look round about upon all things” in the temple, but a zeal for his Father’s glory and for his house, which makes him search and examine into every thing which may be therein contrary to the purity of his worship, and to the edification of his people. This is a pattern for bishops, archdeacons, pastors, visitors, &c.

SECT. II.—*The Fig-tree cursed. The Buyers and Sellers cast out of the Temple. The power of Prayer.*

“ 12. ¶ And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:”

The true hunger of Christ, of which this is only the figure, is his ardent desire of the salvation of men. His bodily hunger plainly shows, that the day of his triumph was to him a day of fasting and mortification. How different are his festival-days from those of the world, in which sensuality and debauchery seem to triumph.

“ 13. And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon : and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves ; for the time of figs was not yet.”

The faith, hope, charity, and good works of the faithful, are the fruits with which Christ satisfies his hunger. Words, promises, barren desires, and outward performances alone, are but useless and unprofitable leaves, upon which he does not feed. Christ does not, either through ignorance, seek for fruit where there is none ; or through injustice, desire to find it when there can be none : but he does all this out of wisdom and goodness, on purpose to raise in us, by this figure, a just apprehension of that day when he will come to examine our lives, and when there will be no longer any time for the performance of good works. In order to have some at that day, we must labour during our whole life.

“ 14. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.”

Christ punishes a tree which did not deserve it, to make us conclude that he would have us understand somewhat else thereby. God would find in us some fruits of righteousness at the hour of death, though that is not the time to begin to produce them. After death there are no more good works, there is no more mercy ; nothing is to be found but wrath, barrenness, and malediction for the wicked.

“ 15. ¶ And they come to Jerusalem : and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew

the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves ;”

Every one of the faithful is the temple of God ; and therefore ought to have the same zeal for the purity of his own heart, which Christ had for the sanctity of the visible temple. Avarice, self-interest, fondness for temporal things, and all other lusts of this life which fill the heart, are the buyers and sellers which must be cast out of this house of God, consecrated by baptism for the offering up of prayer and adoration to him, and glorifying his name. He who, instead of seeking the glory of God by the works of a free and disinterested charity, seeks therein the applause of men, is a trader who seeks a temporal and earthly gain, and not a Christian who seeks God, and worships him in spirit and in truth.

“ 16. And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple.”

Let us imitate this zeal of Christ for the sanctity of God’s house. The severity which he exercises against the profaners of the figurative temple, is but a shadow of that fury with which he will punish in hell all those who profane the living temples by their impurities, their own hearts by their vices, the churches by their irreverence and impieties, and the priesthood of Christ by ambition, by the scandalous merchandise of benefices, and by corruption of manners.

“ 17. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

The prelates, after Christ’s example, ought always

to join the instruction of sinners with the punishment of sin. The church is the place where the divine commerce of religion is carried on betwixt God and man, the band of which is prayer; and where man ought to give himself entirely to God, as God therein gives himself entirely to man. He who does it not is a murderer of his own soul, and a thief who robs God of his right. None but the church can “be called of all nations the house of prayer:” and therefore none but that can be the house of God. The more a Christian applies himself to prayer, the more his heart is the house of God, in which he lives and does every thing in his presence.

“ 18. And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people were astonished at his doctrine.”

Truth always makes a division among men. Some think of nothing but to persecute and suppress it, while others admire, love, embrace, and practise it. It is a dreadful thing to see here who they are who take the resolution to destroy it, without doubt not imagining they were doing it, but really believing themselves on its side. There are some particular seasons, in which it is almost necessary for a man to lie concealed in the crowd of people, to prevent his having any hand in the persecution of truth. That which a man is hindered from doing against it by nothing but fear alone, is already done in the heart.

“ 19. And when even was come, he went out of the city. 20. ¶ And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots.”

Whoever is cursed of God for not having per-

formed good works, is no longer good for any thing but to be cast into the fire as a dry stick. The root of faith remains, during this life, in wicked Christians who have not the fruits of it: but after death there is no more faith, no more hope of fruit; the root itself being dried up. It is frequently dried up even in this life, when no care is taken to cultivate it by Christian vigilance, and to water it with prayer.

“ 21. And Peter, calling to remembrance, saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away.”

One of the subjects to which holy persons apply themselves, is to adore the terrible judgments of the divine justice on the wicked, while these only blaspheme against it. The tree withers away because it was cursed; but it was cursed only because it was unfruitful: whereas, when it bore fruit it was the blessing of God which made it fruitful. Thus it is from the eternal benediction of God that the fruit of good works in the elect does proceed; but it is the want of good works which is the cause of his malediction upon the reprobate.

“ 22. And Jesus answering, saith unto them, Have faith in God.”

Let us admire the efficacy of faith or trust in God, and the force of prayer which is derived from it. That trust or confidence which obtains miracles, is neither wavering nor presumptuous, neither inactive nor too forward. It is very rare for a man to have a will so closely united to God, as to have, as it were, a right to be assured of his without the least doubt, when it is useful or necessary for his glory: but then he has need of abundance of grace, not to fall from

confidence into presumption. A slothful confidence which does not pray with earnestness, and an eager faith which seems to impose a law on God, are equally unworthy to be favoured with a miracle.

“ 23. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.”

The power of God is ours, when our heart is entirely his by a faith which is lively and free from all distrust or doubtfulness. This is the fruit of that holy and faithful friendship which the Holy Ghost forms betwixt God and the saints, and which consists in desiring only the very same things. Nothing is more or less difficult in respect of him who can equally do all things, and whom nothing is able to resist.

“ 24. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”

We obtain every thing of a father, when we address ourselves to him with the confidence of children: because then love prays in us; and God can refuse nothing to that. God promises every thing, without the least exception or reserve, to prayer; because the Holy Spirit, who prays in the saints, knows what he is to ask for them, and cannot possibly ask any thing but what is holy. Since it is the will of God which, in praying like Christians, we desire, in and above all things, a Christian prayer is always heard.

“ 25. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

He who carries along with him to his prayers a spirit of dissension, bitterness, and revenge, brings back nothing but his own condemnation. Christ could not possibly have more plainly given us to understand, that it is charity which must pray, and that God hears nothing besides, than by requiring this virtue of us before all things, which reconciles us both to God and man. The first grace and favour which God confers on sinners, is the pardon and forgiveness of their sins: but then this forgiveness belongs only to those who forgive.

“ 26. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

We must have the heart of a brother towards our neighbour, if we desire God should have that of a Father towards us. If the dread of being disinherited by such a Father, and of losing such an inheritance, do not move a revengeful person, he never had the least notion of what it is to possess God, or what it is to lose him. One cannot lose him as a Father and as an inheritance, without having him for an enemy and a judge. What madness is it, for a man to choose rather to suffer the vengeance of God to all eternity, than to lay aside his own, which can neither last a long time, nor do abundance of hurt !

SECT. III.—*By what Authority.*

“ 27. ¶ And they come again to Jerusalem : and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders,
28. And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things ?”

Those who find themselves vanquished by truth, generally endeavour to reject authority. There are no persons more forward to demand of others a reason for their actions, than those who think they may do every thing themselves without control. Blind priests ! who see not the finger of God, nor his divine authority in the visible and innumerable miracles of Christ, which plainly authorize his mission and his conduct, and evidently prove his divinity. Ignorant scribes ! who talk of nothing but the Scriptures and the law, and yet do not perceive in Christ the author and the perfection, the end and accomplishment, the spirit and the truth of the law, as all the scriptures declare him to be.

“ 29. And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men ? answer me.”

An answer worthy of the wisdom of God. Had he answered, that his authority came from God, he must have proved it, either by his past miracles, against which their malice had hardened them, or by new ones, of which they were altogether unworthy, and which they would likewise have evaded. The shortest and surest way is to force them either to acknowledge the testimony given by John, or to see themselves reduced to a shameful silence. By obliging heretics and irreligious persons to explain their own opinions, one cannot fail of gaining considerably, by the advantage they will give to the cause of truth, though against their inclination.

“ 31. And they reasoned with themselves, saying,

If we shall say, From heaven ; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him ? 32. But if we shall say, Of men ; they feared the people : for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed."

What shifts and evasions does the spirit of Adam seek, that it may avoid yielding to the truth ! When a man can no longer withstand the force of it, but only by insincerity, dissimulation, and artifice, he is convinced, but not converted. Miserable condition this ! for men to set themselves in opposition to truth with the greater obstinacy, the more they know it ; and to employ that very light which reason receives from truth, to defend themselves against the light of truth itself !

" 33. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering, saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Christ discovers not himself to hypocrites. That man is altogether unworthy of the truth, who seeks it only to oppose it. It is to no manner of purpose to dispute and reason with those who study only how to ensnare in their discourse, and to take advantage of every thing against truth. Such persons show plainly what concern they have for truth, when they make use of lies and forgeries to oppress it. Humility does not oblige any one to give an account of his conduct to all sorts of persons, nor at all times, nor in all circumstances, but only to be ready to do it whenever the glory of God and the benefit of his neighbour require it.

CHAPTER XII.

SECT. I.—*The Husbandmen Murderers. The Corner-stone rejected.*

“ 1. AND he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the wine fat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.”

The soul, according to one figurative sense of this parable, is the vineyard of God. When he created it, he planted it; he set a hedge about it, which is that of his commandments. The wine press, is the representative sacrifice which causes the blood of Christ to flow into it. The tower is the church, the house of prayer, in which the soul, being raised from the earth, is secure from its enemies, and finds in the word of God arms strong enough to overcome them. Our soul is not our own: God, who is the creator, is likewise the proprietor of it. We hold it of him, as it were, by lease, only that we may cultivate it, and render to him the fruits which it is capable of producing by his grace. Let us take great care that we be not found, either not having any at all, or claiming the property of them to ourselves.

“ 2. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. 3. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty.”

The fruit and product of our vineyard, is no other than to worship and serve him who gave it us, and to

keep his commandments in resisting our evil inclinations. It is very just that he should receive of the fruit of the vineyard, since it belongs to him, and since he is at all the charge and expense of the workmanship by his grace. The divine law, inspirations, and good motions, are, as it were, the first servants whom God sends to us, to demand the fruit or product of his vineyard. We abuse these when we despise and reject good thoughts and desires, and render them useless and ineffectual, instead of hearkening to and obeying them.

“ 4. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled.”

The Scripture is the second servant sent from God to receive the fruit of his vineyard. To contemn the authority of it through pride, not to believe it through incredulity, to contradict and withstand the truths contained in it out of a spirit of opposition, to neglect the reading of it through slothfulness, and not to obey it through worldly and carnal affection, is a most heinous offence, when it is voluntary, and in a matter of importance. The Scripture is a letter from our heavenly Father. We have but little reverence for such a Father, or love for our heavenly country, when we despise, neglect, or disrespect the letters which come to us from thence.

“ 5. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some.”

The labours of the apostles and their successors, the exhortations of the pastors, and the examples of the saints, are the third servant sent by the Lord of

the vineyard. It is a dreadful thing to make no use of all these, to show no gratitude for them, to hate the persons on the account of the truth, to despise or hate the truths which they deliver, and to trample them under foot: these are, in the sight of God, so many outrages and murders, which will be severely punished. How much more heinous is it then to persecute them?

“ 6. Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.”

At length the Son of God himself, as the only Son of the Lord of the vineyard, is sent in the incarnation and in the eucharist, in his name to retake possession of our heart, which is his vineyard, and to receive from it the fruit of his graces. We should be very sensibly affected, were but any thing of the like nature with this parable to happen in our sight, even though a father should send his son only for his own interest: and yet we are altogether insensible as to that which faith teaches us concerning the only Son of God, sent into the world, and humbled by his Father, purely for our salvation. This ought to convince us that our faith is very weak, and that our salvation is little regarded by us.

“ 7. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. 8. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.”

All deadly sins are so many murders of Jesus Christ. It seems as if sinners had conspired to kill him by innumerable deaths. The Jews killed him only when he was mortal: wicked Christians crucify

him afresh, even now that he is become all-glorious and immortal. That man renders himself guilty of shedding his blood, who, by sacrilegious communions, receives the representation of it unworthily. To sin, is to renew his death, since it was by sin only that he died.

“ 9. What shall therefore the Lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.”

The hour of death and judgment is a dreadful hour, which we do not sufficiently fear. All is lost to a sinner when he once leaves this world; he has no longer a right to any thing, he is not master of any thing, no not even of his own soul, which is forfeited to the justice of God, and delivered up to the devil as the eternal executioner of that eternal justice.

“ 10. And have ye not read this scripture, The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner :”

Happy is that person, who with Christ patiently bears the contempts, affronts, and persecution of sinners in this life; for he shall certainly have a share in his exaltation and glory. Christ is to his church a stone, which is solid by his immortality, white by his purity; a principal one, as being her head; a foundation-stone, as author and finisher of the faith; and a corner-stone, as being the band and union of all his members. They whose business it is to build the spiritual edifice, are sometimes so unhappy as to reject the most lively and excellent stones. But God will certainly take care to reserve them their proper place, and to put them into the building.

“ 11. This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes ?”

It is the joy of the righteous to employ their minds with admiration on the divine qualities of the Son of God, on the mysteries of his life, and the wonders which he has wrought, in order to the redemption of mankind, and to the establishment of his church. Whoever has a true relish of faith, finds no manner of difficulty in depriving himself of the vain amusements of this world and of unprofitable studies, that he may replenish his mind and heart with the truths of religion, and make the most excellent knowledge of Christ and his church his chief pleasure and delight. “ This is the Lord’s doing,” it is his work, and that which is most worthy of him; why then should we be so foolish as to seek elsewhere after something which may be more worthy of us?

“ 12. And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.”

The wicked think of nothing but how to destroy Christ within them by sin, whereas the saints seek him upon earth, and adore him in heaven. It is something, to be so wise as to know when truths are directed to us: but to make no other use of them than to be provoked thereby, is the property of the reprobate. God makes use of human motives, of the fear and the other passions of the wicked, to put a stop to their fury, and suspend the execution of their evil designs, until the very moment in which he has determined to leave them to themselves, and to permit them to act as they please. We need only open our eyes to find sufficient cause to adore the like conduct of God in all places, at all times, and on innumerable occasions.

SECT. II.—*God and Cesar.*

“ 13. ¶ And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.”

The worldly-minded, and the great pretenders to devotion, do but too often combine together against the truth. It is very common for those who can no longer hold out against the force of truth, to make use, in order to silence the defenders of it, of such as have great credit and reputation in the world, either by reason of their profession of piety, or of their authority.

“ 14. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man; for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Cesar, or not? 15. Shall we give, or shall we not give?”

The hypocrisy of these men causes them to make use of truth itself in order to destroy it; and truth makes use of their own words, to confound them. Praise is a very dangerous snare. It is a virtue to praise good men, when it is done without any prejudice to truth, and when the intention is good: but it is no other than flattery, when praise, though ever so well-grounded, is given with an ill design. Generosity and zeal are virtues, which are essential in a minister of Christ: but for such a one to value himself on the account of his zeal and generosity, is a dangerous vice, which may spoil all his other virtues. It is not sufficient for a man “ to teach the way of God in truth,” but he must do it likewise in charity

and prudence ; having a regard to persons, not with respect to the matter of the truths, but to the manner of speaking them.

“ —But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me ? Bring me a penny, that I may see it. 16. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription ? And they said unto him, Cesar’s. 17. And Jesus answering, said unto them, Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marvelled at him.”

True piety alone knows how to render to God that which is due to him, without refusing to princes what belongs to them. It is our duty, neither to forbear speaking the truth through fear of displeasing men, nor to speak it with a design to please them, nor to have any regard to the judgment they may pass either on our silence or our freedom, but to regard only the judgment of truth itself. The wicked do not indeed deserve that truth should be taught them, when they ask for it out of hypocrisy ; but truth deserves to have testimony given to it, whenever its interest depends thereupon. God gives to the upright in heart the dexterity to avoid the snares of hypocrites, and to oblige even them to be instrumental in promoting the cause of truth.

SECT. III.—*The Resurrection, and Angelical state.*

“ 18. ¶ Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection ; and they asked him, saying,”

The devil gives no truce or respite to the Christian, any more than his ministers did to Christ.

When one temptation does not prevail, he immediately raises up another. Let watchfulness and prayer keep us continually in a readiness to fight against this enemy, and to avoid his snares.

“ 19. Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man’s brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.”

Moses and the prophets, the priests and the doctors of the law, are dead, without raising up any children to God, having made only slaves by fear. Christ alone hath raised up some to him, because he brought with him the spirit of adoption, which is the love of God; but still in a greater number after his death, and by his brethren the apostles, who espoused the church in his name, as his proxies and vicars.—Would to God that this heavenly spouse were given to none but the true brethren of Christ, who, by the conformity of their manners and conduct with his, and being filled with his zeal and spirit, might continually raise up children to God.

“ 20. Now, there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. 21. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. 22. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also.”

Happy is she who has but one eternal husband, who shall never be taken from her by death, and who will make her fruitful in good works! By such examples as this, God plainly shows that it is he who gives fruitfulness; and that, without his blessing, every thing is barren. Such a barrenness is like-

wise frequently the just punishment of irregular desires.

“ 23. In the resurrection, therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.”

How carnal are the thoughts of carnal men concerning the life of heaven, and how unworthy of that blessed state! We must lose all the ideas of whatever passes upon earth, in order to frame one which may at all come near the true nature of that eternal happiness. The creature shall belong only to its Creator; man shall live only for his God. She who, while she was on earth, left her father and mother to cleave to her husband, shall then leave both her husband and herself, to cleave eternally to God alone.

“ 24. And Jesus answering, said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?”

The carnal Jews did not know nor understand the Scriptures, because they comprehended not the spirit of them, but explained, according to the letter only, those spiritual and eternal promises, which were wrapped up in the types and shadows of the law, as in a veil. Thus they were far from comprehending the nature of that land of promise, which is the land of the living—of that Jerusalem, of which God himself is the founder and builder—of that heavenly mountain, where the eternal covenant of the chosen people with their God shall be perfected—of that glorious temple, which is the bosom of God himself—of that tabernacle, which the Lord hath pitched and not man—of that High Priest of good things to come, who is himself his own altar and sacrifice with

his church—and of that promise, which was to be fully accomplished only in heaven, namely, That they should be the people, disciples, and children of God; and that he would be their God, their Teacher, and their Father. Let us, if we can, comprehend the power of God; and then we shall easily comprehend how he will fulfil all this in his elect.

“ 25. For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.”

When man entire shall be once put into possession of all the rights belonging to the adoption of the children of God, he will then, without losing any thing of his nature, become altogether spiritual and heavenly; because the Holy Ghost will perfectly possess both his soul and his body. Every other alliance shall be annihilated, when that of the church with God shall be consummated. Let us, as much as possibly we can, begin here below the life of angels, by purity; by fidelity, in doing every thing as in the presence of God; by charity, and by the practice of all other divine virtues; to the end that we may continue it in heaven.

“ 26. And as touching the dead, that they rise; have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? 27. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.”

God is pleased with the remembrance of those whom he has sanctified; and glories more in being called the God of two or three just persons, than the God of heaven and earth. God is, in a most pecu-

liar manner, the God of these patriarchs, being their proper good, their inheritance, their crown, and exceeding great reward, which they are to possess in virtue of his promises : Gen. xv. 1. He is the supreme Good, or the “rewarder of them that diligently seek him,” (Heb. xi. 6.) ; the God for whom Abraham and his children forsook all and gave all, (ver. 8, 17.) upon the prospect of the resurrection, (ver. 19.) and of the reward, (ver. 20.) ; the God of whom he expected something very different from the land of Canaan, in which he only “sojourned, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob,” (ver. 9.) who always looked upon themselves as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” (ver. 13.) desiring earnestly that heavenly country, wherein “he hath prepared for them a city :” (ver. 16.) and it is upon this account that “he is not ashamed to be called their God.”

Now God cannot be, in this sense, “the God of the dead ;” since he cannot be possessed by those who are no more, nor be the proper good, inheritance, and reward of any but “the living.”

Since then, all these saints “died in faith, not having received” the good things which God had promised them with an oath ; (ver. 13, 39.) and since God is faithful, and utterly incapable of failing in the performance of his word and promises ; (chap. vi. 17, 18.) there must necessarily be another life, wherein the heirs of the divine promises may receive the effect of them, both in their souls, by which they are men, and in their bodies, without which they are not such, in which they received these promises, and with which, as the companions of their labours, they

served God. The soul therefore must be immortal, and the body must be re-united to the soul by the resurrection, that they may together enjoy God as their reward, and possess him as their property and inheritance to all eternity.

SECT. IV.—*The love of God, and of our Neighbour.*

“ 28. ¶ And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?”

Amongst a great number of enemies to the truth, there is always found some person who receives it and profits thereby. God by this gives some comfort to an evangelical preacher. One truth established and well rooted in the heart, produces in it a desire of knowing others. Nothing is more capable of inspiring men with the love of God’s law, and of encouraging them to the practice of it, than the belief of another life, and of the resurrection of the dead, which supposes the immortality of the soul. Let us often draw near to Christ by prayer, and humbly beseech him to teach us this “first commandment of all,” by speaking to our heart, and engraving it therein by his Spirit and his grace.

“ 29. And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:”

Observe here, in what true religion does consist: in hearing, believing, and loving God without reserve. The unity of God is the foundation thereof. Happy this people to whom God made himself known, to whom he taught his law with his own

mouth, and to whom he gave himself, had they but known, served, and loved him with all their heart ! Happy that man to whom God has vouchsafed to impart the knowledge of his name, and of the Trinity of his persons, provided he be faithful and grateful, and serve him as the God of his heart ! Say unto my soul, O Lord, that thou art my God, and my only God : but speak it as God, at the same time taking full possession of my heart, as the sole Lord and Master of it.

“ 30. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment.”

God will be loved in truth and with all the heart : and they know not what it is to love God, who suffer themselves to be taken up with any thing whatever, which may drive away, diminish, or divert that love which is due to him. It is by loving God, that we serve and worship him in this life ; it is by the same, that we find and possess him in the other : and as we cannot possess him but with all our heart, so we must also love him with all our heart. It is love which gives motion to the heart, which inclines the soul as its bias, which fills the mind with thoughts, and which takes up and employs our whole strength. To the end, therefore, that all our motions, inclinations, thoughts, and strength, may be directed to God, it is necessary that our whole love be the love of God.

“ 31. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”

It is a duty to love our neighbour, if not as much as ourselves, at least in the same rank wherein we ought to love ourselves, desiring for him an exemption from the same evils, the enjoyment of the same good things, and above all, of the sovereign, unchangeable, and eternal Good. There is no true love of our neighbour but the Christian love, which desires that he may enjoy God: for that alone can be true, which desires for him the possession of that good which only can make him happy.

“ 32. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:”

One only God requires one heart, and one love. The sacrifice of faith and charity is the only sacrifice which can be worthy of God. Love in this life, is an inclination whereby the creature seeks its chiefest good; as love in the other, is that complacency whereby it rests in the enjoyment of that good. No other deserves in the least to be sought, except that alone, in which we are to rest eternally as in the fountain of all good.

“ 33. And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.”

How great is the goodness of God to require nothing of us but our heart, devoted to him by love, and to give us even that which he requires! Who, after this, can desire to free himself from so amiable an obligation? Our sacrifice is within ourselves: that which God requires of us is not a victim of a

different nature, but our own heart, which he would have us sacrifice to him by evangelical self-denial, mortification, and the fire of charity. No sacrifice can please God without this, and this alone can please him without any other.

“34. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.”

To love and to assert the truth when an occasion offers, is oftentimes a considerable step towards salvation. It is a great matter for a man to know his duty, and to be convinced of the obligations under which he lies; but this does not immediately bring him to the kingdom of God. “God is love; and he who dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God dwelleth in him,” and lives and reigns in him by his Spirit. A silence of assent and submission, is a silence useful to salvation: but a silence of weakness and obstinacy, is the condemnation of the enemies of the truth.

SECT. V.—*Christ the Lord of David. Proud Teachers.*

“35. ¶ And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? 36. For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

Faith alone, which knows what Christ is by his divine nature, and what he is become by his mercy, knows how to reconcile the seeming contradictions

which are in this divine compound, God-man: son of David, by his birth according to the flesh; and Lord of David, by his eternal birth in God his Father, as also by the rights of his third birth, namely, his resurrection, which placed him at the right hand of his Father. Now is the time in which we must choose where we will be to all eternity: either under his feet as rebellious slaves, subdued by his power, and subjected to his justice, or in his body as faithful members, sanctified by his Spirit, and obedient to their head. Let us make our choice, there is no time to be lost.

“37. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly.”

The relish of God’s word is much greater in those who abound in simplicity and faith, than in those who have a large stock of wit and learning. It is necessary for us to love the truth, if we would rejoice in seeing it triumph; but to love it as we ought, we must love nothing which it condemns, and every thing which it commands.

“38. ¶ And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market-places, 39. And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts; 40. Which devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.”

Hypocritical teachers and directors of the conscience, are those of whom we ought to have the greatest distrust. We may discover them by the following marks. 1. When we observe that they

seek to distinguish themselves by external singularities. 2. When they love every thing which may gain them esteem. 3. When they desire to have the preference before others in matters of religion. 4. When they love to be distinguished in public assemblies. 5. When they endeavour to draw all the wealth they can from the women under their care. 6. When they affect to appear as men who have the gift of prayer.—What a sad misfortune is it, that men should live like Pharisees under the gospel, and mix hypocrisy with a religion which ought to be nothing but spirit and truth ! There is no person indeed in the world, but either seeks a false glory, or is not altogether insensible thereto ; because there is none who has not some degree of pride : but there are known hypocrites, and there is a pride full of artifice and design, which must not be gently treated. There is nothing so directly opposite to that chaste and sincere love which we owe to God, as this unjust desire of distinction and preference.

SECT. VI.—*The Widow who cast into the Treasury of her want.*

“ 41. ¶ And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury : and many that were rich cast in much. 42. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.”

The notice which Christ takes of these offerings gives us to understand, that God judges even at present of all the alms which are given by men, but that he does not judge of them as men do. They are not the rich upon whom Christ fixes his eyes ;

but it was only for the sake of this poor widow that he came hither, and sat, and beheld the rich and their offerings. It is of little consequence to this poor woman, to be either neglected or despised by every body, while the rich are respected, and their liberality admired; the approbation of Christ alone is of more advantage to her than every thing in the world, and supplies the want of every thing besides.

“ 43. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury :”

It is of importance, that prelates and ecclesiastical persons should know perfectly how to value good works, and to judge of them, not as the world, but as God judges. It is for this very purpose, that Christ expressly calls the apostles, and makes them come to behold this sight. He who equally sees the hand and the heart, judges of the former only by the latter. It is matter of great consolation for the poor, to be able to give even more than the rich, and to surpass them in liberality.

“ 44. For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”

One single farthing, given by a person in want, and with a free heart, is more, in the sight of God, than millions given by the rich, and with a heart not truly Christian. We give the more, the less we reserve to ourselves in proportion to what we give. Never did any king come near the liberality of this poor widow, who reserves nothing for herself. This alms has enough in it to humble both the rich, who

by reason of covetousness, give but little, and the poor, who through a distrust of Providence, give nothing at all.

CHAPTER XIII.

SECT. I.—*The Destruction of Jerusalem. False Prophets.*

“ 1. AND as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here !”

The world admires a stately and magnificent temple : but the temple which attracts the eyes and the heart of Christ, as worthy of God and framed by his Spirit, is a heart which resembles that of this poor widow, a heart consecrated by charity, wherein God makes his abode, and in which this virtue worships him, sacrifices itself to him, mourns continually in his presence, and there feeds upon his divine word.

“ 2. And Jesus answering, said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings ? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

Christ bears with the simplicity of his disciples, who would have him admire a temple of which he was himself the model, and which was only a figure of his body : but he makes use of this simplicity to instruct them, to take off their minds from this visible temple, and to give them a foresight of that justice which he was to exercise upon this building, on the account of the Jews. Nothing of that which is to be destroyed is worthy to be the true temple of God. It is in a poor and humble heart that he de-

lights to dwell. Happy that, in which God alone is adored and loved !

“ 3. ¶ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, asked him privately, 4. Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled ?”

Christ gives occasion to the apostles to pass from a vain and unprofitable curiosity to one which is holy and of great advantage. Let us study to imitate him on proper occasions. Those who are commissioned to proclaim to the world the judgments of God and the miseries to come, may seek after the knowledge and the signs of them with success, not in the stars, nor in vain predictions, but in the Scriptures.

“ 5. And Jesus answering them, began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you : 6. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”

A great number of deceivers is one of the signs of the end of the world. It is a terrible judgment upon men, for them to believe that they are consulting a man of God who may instruct them, while they are consulting only a seducer who deceives them. Let us beg of God to preserve us from it. The expectation of new and extraordinary things, is an occasion of which the devil generally makes an ill use in order to deceive men. An author of heresy or schism, an usurper of Christ’s authority, a minister without mission, these are all so many false Christs, whom we must carefully avoid as so many seducers.

SECT. II.—*Persecutions. The assistance of the Holy Ghost. Perseverance.*

“ 7. And when ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.”

That person well deserves to be envied, who, amidst the most tempestuous troubles of this world, lives in a profound calm, as a citizen of another world raised above this. When a man once thoroughly knows this present world, what its spirit is, and what the end of it is to be, he is prepared for all events, and is troubled at nothing. We do not sufficiently consider all the commotions of empires, and wars of nations, as being in the hand of God, and making part of his judgments. All these things must needs come to pass, but wo unto those by whom they come !

“ 8. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom ; and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.”

All the afflictions and miseries of this life are but the beginning of hell to the wicked: but to the elect they are a purification. To the former they are the occasion of new sins; to the latter, they are, as it were, a glass, which represents to them their rebellion against God, the insurrection of their passions, their immoderate fears of the evils of this life, their vain hopes, and their hunger after its false enjoyments; and at the same time, a means of making some little amends for all these disorders by repentance and mortification.

“ 9. But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.”

Let us take heed to ourselves; not that we may avoid persecution and disgrace from men, for this is the lot of the true disciples and ministers of Christ; but that we may receive them like Christians, and in the spirit of our Master. The true way to secure ourselves from the terrors of God’s judgment, is to be little concerned at the judgment and anger of men; and to bear testimony to Christ by our words and actions, without any dreadful apprehensions of what we may suffer on that account.

“ 10. And the gospel must first be published among all nations.”

The faith is universal as well as the church. They have an equal extent, and the one cannot be without the other: the faith being the foundation of the church, and the church being the house, the pillar, and support of the faith. That doctrine and that church, which, from the beginning, and even at this present time, were, and are preached, by the apostles or their successors, are the only evangelical doctrine, and the only true church of Christ.

“ 11. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.”

It is God who speaks in the martyrs and confessors. A forecast which is too cautious, and proceeds from human weakness, often renders us unworthy of

that which God would otherwise perform in us. How good is it to resign ourselves up entirely to his Spirit, avoiding equally presumption and negligence! The Holy Ghost does in us whatever he enables us to do; and is, at that time, the principle and author of our words, desires, and good works. So that every good action, every good inclination of the will, and every good use of the tongue, ought to be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Not that each of these is not also a free act of the will of man, but because it is grace alone which is the principal cause, which goes before, excites, heals, applies, and puts the will in motion.

“ 12. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.”

Faith gives us as many fathers, children, brethren, and sisters, as there are Christians: infidelity changes even those whom nature has given us into enemies, betrayers, and executioners. But all this does not affect him to whom God is all things. The temptation the most dangerous, and most sensible to nature, is that which arises from our kindred and relations: but it is in this very thing that the triumph of grace appears more illustrious, in breaking the strongest and dearest ties, in order to unite us entirely to God alone.

“ 13. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

Faith and charity join us in the closest union with strangers and the most barbarous people: infidelity and hatred break even the strictest ties of nature. Happy

is that person who is hated for the sake either of the truth which he maintains, or of the virtue which he practises, and does not grow at all weary of being so ! His cause is the cause of God. And what greater honour and happiness can we possibly have, than to be joined in the same cause with our Judge, who is at the same time the Holy One and the Almighty ! Lord, it is thy own cause : but who could ever support and maintain it, if thy grace did not support him, and that to the end !

SECT. III.—*The Abomination in the Holy Place.
Flight. Extreme Evils.*

“ 14. ¶ But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains : ”

We have reason to fear, that the wrath of God is ready to fall upon a people, when we see the abomination of error, sacrilege, and impiety, and the profanation of holy things, reign among them. In times of the divine displeasure, the most secure and beneficial flight, is to fly from the corruption of the world, and to depart from its maxims and manners. In public calamities, the generality of people think how to save their goods and their lives ; but few consider how they may save their souls : the reason is, because men reflect more upon the calamities themselves, than upon the sins which have drawn them down.

“ 15. And let him that is on the house-top not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house : 16. And let him

that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment."

There is no time, which is not a time of abomination and desolation ; since sin, which is the greatest of all, never ceases to lay waste the world. Happy that person, who, during this life, is either on the house-top, by having embraced the state of evangelical perfection, or in the field, by a laborious and penitential life. It is a great folly in either of them, to go down, or to turn back, in order to take up that which they have quitted, and to enter again into the conversation of the world.

" 17. But wo to them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days !"

Unhappy that fruitfulness which produces nothing but miserable wretches ! Happy those women who have chosen the part to have nothing to do in the world, but only to secure the salvation of their souls, and, like wise virgins, to keep themselves always in a readiness to trim their lamps ! It is a very great misfortune, at the hour of death, either to find the heart only big with good desires, or to see only some small beginnings of good works, as yet feeble and imperfect. To be able to abide the wrath of God, we must have works, and those such as are animated and strengthened by charity.

" 18. And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter."

How late is it, to begin our flight from the world and sin in the winter of old age and death ! In the winter, the days are short, the ways bad, the season rainy, the night comes on before we are aware, and we meet with a thousand impediments and hinder-

ances of flight and travelling : these are a lively representation of those hinderances of salvation which men find at the end of their lives. The grace to prevent them by a speedy conversion is obtained only by prayer.

“ 19. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation, which God created, unto this time, neither shall be.”

There is nothing so dreadful as that which passes, at the end of life, in a soul which has never thought of disengaging and weaning itself from the world. What affliction or misery can equal that of a Christian, who can then find nothing in his whole life, from the beginning to the end thereof, but what must render him unworthy of mercy ! But the greatest of all miseries would be to despair of this mercy, and not to have recourse to it.

“ 20. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved : but for the elect’s sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.”

Time is designed only to be subservient to the eternity of the elect : every thing is for them. God measures the days of their life by the election which he has made of them for heaven : and he often shortens them, lest they should be corrupted by the wickedness of the world. If God did not put a stop to the malicious designs of the devil against them, how could they possibly escape his fury ? We shall never know, until we come to heaven, either the number or the nature of those temptations from which God has delivered us, both during our life, and at the approach of death.

SECT. IV.—*False Christs. The Elect almost seduced. The coming of Christ.*

“21. And then, if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ ; or, lo, he is there ; believe him not :”

How apprehensive ought we to be, lest we should take a false Christ for the true, error for truth, and a corrupt morality for the gospel of Jesus Christ ! We must persevere to the very end in the way of the gospel, wherein God has been pleased to set us. It is a very great misfortune to wander at the end of our days, and to fall into the ways of delusion, under pretence of greater perfection, more elevated contemplation, or the like.

“22. For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.”

God himself directs his elect, when they fall into the hands of a seducer, or else by his goodness soon removes them from him. The religion of Jesus Christ being confirmed by so many undoubted miracles, it is the greatest folly imaginable to hearken to those who would dissuade us from acknowledging him to be the true Christ, although they should show even signs and wonders. The unity of Christ is to Christians the same thing which the unity of God was to the Jews, who were expressly forbidden to hearken to any who should seek to turn them away from the worship of the true God, which had been established by so many miraculous works, even though they should perform such things as might otherwise justly make them pass for prophets. Deut. xiii.

“ 23. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.”

The word of Christ ought to render us watchful, humble, and perseverant in prayer. It is a very great piece of infidelity, not to profit by the warnings and admonitions of Christ, so as to take particular heed of the dangers which he points out to us, and to exercise a Christian vigilance in relation to ourselves and to our duties. He has foretold us all things, and it can be only our own fault and negligence, if we are surprised by seducers, or drawn aside into errors. To be so, is the punishment either of curiosity, or of pride and presumption, or of forgetfulness as to religious duties, and especially prayer, or of neglect in the sacred study of the Scriptures.

“ 24. ¶ But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,”

There will be nothing but darkness for impenitent sinners at the time of death and judgment. That is the time of affliction for every one who has given up his heart to the world, or to error. His faith, which he abandoned during his life, frequently in its turn abandons him. He loses sight of Christ, the church disappears before his eyes, and he no longer receives any light, either from this sun or this moon of the new world.

“ 25. And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.”

There is nothing so dreadful to the wicked, as the coming of Christ in his anger, at the hour of death. They see all things perishing as to themselves here below, and no hopes of succour from above.

Those natural lights, with which they pleased themselves so much, are now become nothing but darkness to them; and they see that the power and strength on which they relied, are no other than weakness itself.

“ 26. And then they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds, with great power and glory.”

There is nothing so worthy of Jesus Christ as that day of his power and glory: there is nothing so dreadful to a sinner, who has laboured only to deserve his wrath. To such a person, the day of his death is this terrible day of the Lord. At that time the devil leaves him no more faith than just enough to foresee the rigour of the divine judgment, and all these preparations for the day of vengeance.

“ 27. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.”

O desirable day for the elect! O happy re-union, so long expected, by which Christ will gather them together, and join them in the unity of his body, his Spirit, and his glory! The wicked shall see nothing of this but what shall grieve and afflict them; and cause them, at the sight of the happiness of the elect, to say within themselves, “ We fools accounted their life madness, and their end to be without honour: how are they numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints !”

“ 28. Now learn a parable of the fig-tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: 29. So ye, in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors.”

What man is there who has any assurance that the time of his appearance before God, in order to be judged, is not as near at hand as that of summer is, when the fig-tree putteth forth leaves. We often depend upon a long life: whereas life is but, as it were, a leaf ready to fall, and to become the sport of winds in a moment.

“ 30. Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.”

Since all things which are foretold must infallibly be accomplished, what blindness and folly is it, not to secure our salvation by a truly Christian life ! Every thing which God declares to us, in relation to those great truths concerning the shortness of life, the uncertainty of the hour of death, the severity of his judgment, &c. is grounded upon the infallible truth of his word, confirmed by so many miracles : and yet the generality of Christians either believe it not, or live as if it were only a fable, or something which did not at all concern them !

“ 31. Heaven and earth shall pass away : but my words shall not pass away.”

How many are there who rely more upon the word of a man, who is nothing but falsehood, than upon that of truth itself, which is infallible ! Is not that which we ourselves have seen pass in the world, during the little time we have been in it, of itself alone a certain pledge of the truth of this declaration ? The history of the world is only a history of what is past; a picture of the instability of human affairs, and a proof that every thing passes away ; that every thing is really nothing, and that God alone is all. Be thou alone therefore, O my God,

all things to me ! and grant that I may adhere entirely to thee, who continuest always the same !

SECT. V.—*The Day uncertain. Watchfulness and Prayer.*

“ 32. ¶ But of that day, and that hour, knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”

It imports but little to know that day : but it is of infinite importance to be always ready, that we may not be surprised by it. A man who is not surprised by the day, is surprised by the hour : so rare and uncommon a thing is it to be watchful to the end. Let us shut the eyes of our curiosity concerning that day ; and let us open those of our vigilance upon every day, every hour, and every moment. The Word is nothing, can do nothing, and knows nothing but by his Father, who communicates every thing to him by his eternal birth. And the man, united to the Word, in like manner, is, can do, and knows nothing, but only by the Word, who, in one sense, communicates to him in the incarnation whatever he receives from his Father.

“ 33. Take ye heed, watch and pray : for ye know not when the time is.”

The exercise of a Christian who expects the time of death, and who ought every day to expect it, is frequently to examine his heart, and to keep it clean, to oppose sloth, and continually to rouse up his faith, having the arms of prayer always ready. God has thought fit, that the end of our life, and that of the world, should be always concealed from us, to induce us to look upon every day as the last.

“ 34. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.”

The whole which our blessed Master, when he ascended into heaven, recommended to the care of his servants, consisted in fidelity and watchfulness: fidelity, in doing every thing well which is to be done in his house, in the heart, in the church, according to the full extent of their duty: watchfulness, in suffering no stranger nor enemy to enter by the senses, which are the gates of the soul, in permitting nothing which belongs to the master to go out without his orders, and in carefully observing all commerce and correspondence which the heart may have abroad in the world, to the prejudice of the master’s service.

“ 35. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning;”

To watch, is to be like a servant, always employed within about his master’s business, and like a porter, always careful in examining what comes in and goes out. The more the master is expected, the more diligent the servants are in working, watching, and keeping themselves in readiness. Can one who has received the sentence of his death, and has no right to live one moment, need any admonition to prepare himself to die? Does not a prisoner who expects his deliverance, keep himself always ready to leave his dungeon? And is not he who has no such expectation extremely miserable? The hour of death is so very uncertain, that Christ would have us look

for it at all hours, and therefore mentions four several parts of one and the same night, at any of which it may possibly happen.

“ 36. Lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.”

Remissness and negligence, as well as the greater sins, are often the occasion of our being surprised by death. A porter asleep exposes the house to be robbed, and well deserves to be punished. A Christian, whose faith is not watchful, exposes his own heart to the enemy of his salvation, and to those who are continually watching, in order to steal away all the valuable things which God has laid up there, as in his own house.

“ 37. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.”

No person can pretend any exemption from the fear of God’s judgment, or from the duty of watchfulness in expectation of the last day. Christ here recommends it to all ; and yet there is scarce a small number to be found, who, by Christian watchfulness, are always ready. Those who have greatest occasion to watch, are generally those who do it the least. Few pastors, masters, superiors, and fathers, watch over their flock, their servants, their subjects, and their children. Abundance of people are very watchful throughout their whole life as to the affairs of others ; but do not spend one moment in watching over their own heart, and in thinking seriously of the business of salvation. My God, how much is faith obscured and darkened, and what need have we that thou shouldest renew it in our hearts !

CHAPTER XIV.

SECT. I.—*The Conspiracy of the Jews. Precious Ointment poured on Christ's head.*

“ 1. AFTER two days was the feast of the pass-over, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death.”

When once a priest has lost the spirit of religion, and a doctor or teacher the love of truth, they think of nothing but how to sacrifice both to their self-love. This passion is too cunning, to neglect to cover its injustice, and to varnish over those crimes which might defame it in the world. But of what use is it to conceal the filthiness of sin from the eyes of men, but only to double the guilt in the sight of God, and to cast greater obstacles in the way to repentance?

“ 2. But they said, Not on the feast-day, lest there be an uproar of the people.”

These men were not at all afraid of committing this crime on the feast-day, but they were afraid they should not have an opportunity of doing it on that day: so fully had the desire of completing this wickedness possessed them. The offer of Judas caused them to lay aside their apprehensions, and to change their mind: or rather God, who conducts his designs as he pleases, and intended at that time to substitute the true Paschal Victim in the room of the figurative passover, hereby made it evident, that sinners do nothing in all their wickedness but that only which he permits them to do.

“ 3. ¶ And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman, having an alabaster-box of ointment of spikenard, very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.”

Happy that person who knows how to make that subservient to charity, which others dedicate to the service of concupiscence ! Every thing which is given to God is acceptable to him, when it is charity which gives it. Zeal and love for Jesus Christ have commendable excesses. Great expense in external magnificence designed to honour him, would most commonly be better employed in feeding his members: but there are some extraordinary occasions, on which a sort of profuseness cannot be blamed. It belongs to him, who gives this love, to inform us when and how far we are permitted to gratify it.

“ 4. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?”

The fervent zeal of devout persons is generally censured by the world as indiscretion: but the judgment of the world is not the rule of their actions. When a man has any thing to spend or waste, he cannot sacrifice it so well as to the honour of Christ: and it is much better to waste and destroy all those things, which may be instrumental to luxury or any other vice, and become snares to others, be their value ever so great, such as excellent, but obscene pictures, &c. than to leave them to the use of the world.

“ 5. For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.”

To regulate the duties of religion and those of charity, as to outward appearance, requires abundance of prudence. The traitor, who raised this murmur in the apostolical college, made use of their zeal to cover his own avarice. So dangerous is it to have any corrupt leaven in an ecclesiastical society. They are generally temporal interests which carnal men do there take most to heart, and which exasperate them against those who have little value for such things. These ought really to be very little esteemed among those, who have quitted all for the sake of God, or ought at least to be ready to do it.

“ 6. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.”

It belongs to God, to speak in behalf of his servants; and to them, silently to bear the censures of the world. The world is a very bad judge in matters relating to God, because it generally judges concerning them with passion, and without knowledge. Those who do not follow its maxims it condemns without mercy, not being able to endure that they should apply their substance to a religious and penitential use, much less that they should serve Christ at the expense of all.

“ 7. For ye have the poor with you always, and whosoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.”

During Christ’s residence upon earth, it was necessary visibly to honour him in his own person; and since he is no longer visible himself, it is necessary to do it in that of the poor. There are two ways of honouring him: by internal and external duties. As to the first, it is sufficient that he be

present by faith, or by an invisible presence in the eucharist. As to the second, it is necessary he should be visible, and he is so in the poor, whom he has substituted in his stead, and who demand and receive, in his name, whatever he requires in this kind of duties.

“ 8. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.”

Christ would not lose any part of the honour due to his mysteries: he hastens the accomplishment of them by anticipation, that he may shed forth the spirit and grace of them, in favour of those who love him. It was lawful to pay even external honours to the mysteries of Christ, before they were accomplished: how much more then, may, and ought we to do it, since they are?

“ 9. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.”

That which to the eyes of the flesh seems no better than folly, is proposed by Christ to the eyes of faith, as an action of true wisdom. The saints honour Jesus Christ, and he honours the saints, in causing them to be honoured. Nothing is more conformable to his spirit, than to celebrate their memory and publish their praise. Far is he from being at all jealous at our doing this, since we do it by his appointment, with regard to him, and upon his account, and are as far from adoring them with that divine worship which we pay to him, as the creature is distant from the Creator.

SECT. II.—*The Bargain and Treachery of Judas.
The Paschal Supper.*

“ 10. ¶ And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them.”

See here a surprising spectacle ! On one side, a woman, formerly in the power of the devil, gives herself up entirely to Christ, and pours out her heart and her good things upon him. On the other, an apostle of Jesus Christ gives himself up to the devil, betrays his master into the hands of his ministers, and thinks of nothing but shedding his blood. Who can forbear trembling, when he reflects upon this league and conspiracy, betwixt a prince of the Christian Church and the prince of the Jewish, to destroy the Church itself in its Founder and Head ? Christ sees and permits it, to teach the faithful not to be greatly troubled at the desertion and treachery even of pastors, when it happens in the Church.

“ 11. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.”

The joy of the wicked is to have success in their crimes. But what joy is this ? It is the joy only of a moment, which will be changed into everlasting sorrow. It was easy for our blessed Saviour to have broken this sacrilegious, and, as it may be called, simoniacial bargain, by diverting this opportunity, which depended on himself : but it was necessary that sin should be instrumental in the destruction of sin, and that the author of life should die to destroy death and his empire.

“ 12. ¶ And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare, that thou mayest eat the passover? 13. And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.”

It belongs to the apostles and the proper pastors, according to Christ’s appointment, to prepare the true passover of the paschal sacrifice and communion, and likewise the hearts of the faithful for it, in purifying them from the leaven of sin by the exercises of repentance. This pitcher of water is an emblem of baptism and repentance. None but those who have been cleansed by this water can eat the Christian passover; neither can this passover be either celebrated or eaten, but only in the bosom of the Church.

“ 14. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? 15. And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.”

Christ alone knows in what heart he is to keep a true passover, “not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” We ought not to make ourselves ready any otherwise than according to his will; we cannot do it but by his grace, which alone can make our heart become a new lump, purged from all leaven.

“ 16. And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.”

The knowledge, power, and wisdom of Jesus, appear in all his works. He makes them at this time more particularly known to the apostles, on purpose to strengthen their faith and confidence, to prepare them for temptation, and to induce them the more easily to believe the mystery he was going to celebrate in their presence.

“ 17. And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. 18. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.”

Christ expiates the vain joy and foolish mirth of worldly feasts by the sadness of this repast, wherein he thinks of nothing but the cross which was preparing for him. God is dishonoured by those immoderate overflowings of heart, in which the sweetness of human friendships does consist, and to which we are most apt to give way at the table of our friends. Christ makes amends for this dishonour, by that reserve of heart which the treachery of Judas causes, and by the mortifying consideration of that little fidelity which he foresees in his disciples and friends.

“ 19. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?”

There is no sin whatever, of which a man ought not to think himself capable, since he has the seed of all in his corrupt will. It is just that the disciples should partake in that affliction of heart which their Master underwent; and there is scarcely a greater in friendship, than for a man to be suspected of infidelity and treachery by his friend. Alas! how few are there, even of those who eat at Christ’s table,

who are not guilty at least of the smaller instances of treachery and infidelity towards him, and those almost without number !

“ 20. And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.”

God does not cease to admonish the sinner, though he sees him determined, by his wickedness, to commit the sin. The reason is, because he has more than one design in his conduct; and because the righteous, through his grace, profit by those admonitions which the wicked render ineffectual by the corruption of their heart. It is good sometimes to make even the most virtuous persons apprehensive, that they have something which lurks in their heart of which they are not sensible, to the end they may examine themselves thoroughly, and be more distrustful of that corrupt principle which makes them capable of all evil.

“ 21. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him; but wo to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed ! good were it for that man if he had never been born.”

God does whatever he pleases, both with and by the wicked. Let us beseech him to do his holy will both in and by us, in our heart, and for our salvation. Wretched is that man who serves the designs of God only by his sins. It were much better for a man absolutely not to be, than to employ his being only in the service of sin; but God, in his wisdom, judges it better to permit sin, that his glory may appear the more illustrious in the good which he knows how to bring out of it by his power. We rejoice at the birth of a child; but how often ought we to shed

a flood of tears, were we but able to look into the future ! How lovely and adorable is this goodness of Christ, who solicits this traitor afresh to enter again into himself, by the consideration both of the dreadful punishment attending his crime, and of the prophecies wherein he had been instructed, together with the rest of the apostles ! But what strange obduracy, what malice is there in this wretch, which renders so much gentleness and goodness ineffectual.

SECT. III.—*The Eucharist.*

“ 22. ¶ And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.”

Jesus Christ bestows his gifts in a manner very remote from the haughtiness of the great. These make their presents with pomp and ostentation; because, in reality, they are nothing, and because there is no way of setting them off but by words and external ceremonies. He bestows his greatest gifts with the greatest simplicity in the world, because they are beyond all expression, and because he knows well how to make men sensible of their worth and efficacy by faith, and by the effects which they produce in the heart.

“ 23. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. 24. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.”

The blood of Jesus Christ becomes, through his goodness, milk for his children, a band of union to his members, the seal of his covenant, and the ran-

som of his slaves; and, on the contrary, through the wickedness of the imitators of Judas, it becomes to them a mortal poison, a sword of separation, the seal of their reprobation, and the cause of an eternal captivity. “They all drank of it;” for Christ does not withdraw his presence from the eucharist on the account of the greatest sinners, not even of Judas. Miserable wretch! in whom the very height of ingratitude is formed by the sacrifice and sacrament of thanksgiving, and by the greatest of all benefits. This is the last for Judas, and very often for many others.

“25. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Let us take care to raise our hearts from the sacramental communion here on earth, to the eternal communion in heaven, to be celebrated there, not under veils or sensible symbols, but openly and without veils. The sight of truth, unveiled and perfectly disclosed to our eyes, is a torrent of delight and joy, which, as it were, inebriates the soul, makes it forget all the afflictions and miseries of the earth, and transports it out of itself, in order to its living only in the truth, upon the truth, and for the truth. O eternal truth! may the hopes of being satisfied with thee in heaven, engage thy disciples to taste thee on earth, to feed upon thee, to adhere constantly to thee, to love and desire nothing but thee, and to sacrifice themselves for thy sake.

“26. ¶ And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

Praise and thanksgiving, both on earth and in

heaven, precede, accompany, and follow the communion of the Christian church. Can he who relishes Christ, who comprehends that which he receives and eats, and which nourishes him in the holy sacrament, forbear breaking forth into praises and thanksgivings? Praise never ceases in heaven; but on earth it is interrupted by prayer. The reason is, because the benefits which God confers upon us are soon succeeded by new wants and necessities. Let us then, with Christ and his apostles, frequently pass from the praises of their assembly in the upper-room to the prayers in the garden.

SECT. IV.—*Peter's Denial foretold.*

“ 27. And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”

The apostles, going from the very communion, meet with an occasion of sin, and fall thereby! Who can forbear trembling? The sufferings and cross of Christ scatter and disperse the sheep for some time; but it is only in order to re-unite them afterwards, and with and by them to unite all nations in one fold, and under one shepherd. Thus persecutions seem to lay the church waste, and they establish it; to intimidate the pastors, and they encourage them; to suppress the truth, and they confirm it, propagate it, and give it a new lustre.

“ 28. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.”

It is a very great consolation to the diseased and infirm members, to be assured that their head will

not abandon them when they fall, but that he will even go before them. If Jesus did not vouchsafe to come to meet us, in the power of his new-raised life, that is, by powerful graces, how should we be able ever to rise and go to him?

“ 29. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.”

To presume upon our own strength, to prefer ourselves before others, and not to hearken to admonitions, are three branches of pride, and three occasions of very grievous falls. Peter thought himself in some measure free from sin, and infallible; since he was confident he should not fall, notwithstanding the assurance which Christ gave him of the contrary: and it was this foolish imagination which caused him to fall more grossly and shamefully. My God, how little does man know himself, if he believes he can have any dependence upon his own heart! Christ is our strength, when we rely upon him; but he is only an occasion of our falling, when we do not put our whole confidence in his strength.

“ 30. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.”

Christ knows even the least motion of our heart: let us, therefore, beseech him to impart some of his knowledge to us, that we may know it ourselves, and to our own advantage. The day, the hour, the moment of Peter’s fall, are expressly declared to him; but pride has drawn a veil over his heart, and his fall is necessary, to convince him that he is capable of falling.

“ 31. But he spake the more vehemently, If I

should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all."

Pride is obstinate in the presumption which it has of its own strength. This is a very contagious distemper. One of the chief of the pastors was more sick of it than the rest, and even infected the others therewith. God permitted this, to the end that his example, being the more remarkable, might make the deeper impression, and raise a greater apprehension of falling into it. God punishes those more severely who are the first in giving a bad example, and become thereby the source of sin in a community. They all said the same thing with Peter, and yet he alone, left to himself, denies his Master.

SECT. V.—*The Agony in the Garden. Watch and Pray.*

" 32. ¶ And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray."

An afflicted heart ought to shut itself up from men by retirement, and to open itself to God by prayer. Christ, as the good Shepherd, does that first himself which he enjoins his sheep to do, preventing temptations by prayer. He prays retired, not out of any necessity, but both out of obedience to his Father, who had prescribed this to him as well as all the rest; and out of love towards us, whom he would instruct, edify, and redeem by this means.

" 33. And he taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;"

The sight of God's justice casts even his Son into

fear and amazement, and our sins raise in him a mortal grief; and shall we alone remain insensible of both? We could not enjoy one moment of satisfaction, should God be pleased to open our eyes, that we might see, as our blessed Saviour did, our own sins and his justice, in all their dreadful and amazing circumstances. Christ has borne them both for us, and even spared us the mortification of so grievous and dismal a sight.

“ 34. And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.”

It is the duty of a Christian soul to tarry and continue with Christ under his sufferings, and to contemplate his pains and sorrows. We could never have known how exceeding painful the inward sufferings of Christ were, had he not discovered them himself. Let us have, at least, a grateful sense both of his condescension in vouchsafing to lay open his heart to us while it was under this mortal sorrow, and of his love in choosing to open and expose it thereto for our sakes. How good is it to open our heart to him when it is oppressed with grief, in order to attract that grace which he has merited for us by this sorrow unto death !

“ 35. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.”

Observe here the extreme humiliation of Christ in prayer. Pastors have sometimes such heavy crosses to bear, that they beseech God, but with the greatest submission, that they may be delivered from them. It is expedient to make such addresses in private, that they may not discourage those whom

they ought to encourage to suffer all things for God and his church.

“ 36. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

What averseness soever the flesh has to suffering and death, the spirit ought to accept both the one and the other. The will of God ought always to be dearer to us than our own, whatever it may cost us to perform it. God can employ his almighty power in delivering us from our afflictions; but it often tends more to his glory and our advantage to employ it in supporting us under them. When we see the only Son of God not delivered from this cup, even after so much importunity, who can complain when he himself is not?

“ 37. And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?”

Peter ought to be thoroughly sensible that he has promised too much upon his own strength, since he finds himself overcome even by sleep. It is upon this account that Christ speaks particularly to him. God permits the lesser faults, on purpose to cure men of presumption; but when they take no warning thereby, he suffers them to have grievous falls. Peter is not sensible of this: the reason is, because a man never sees any thing when he is full of himself, and presumes upon his own strength. He falls, both for himself and for us: let us profit by his fall, as he did.

“ 38. Watch ye, and pray, lest ye enter into temptation: the spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.”

If we must watch and pray, to prevent and withstand temptation, let us not be surprised that so many enter into it and fall thereby : it is for no other reason, but because there are very few who watch and pray in that manner, and with that constancy, which they ought. Prayer is necessary in order to watch, and watchfulness in order to pray ; and both the one and the other are so, to secure us from temptation. Peter was deficient in vigilance, because he was so in prayer ; and through the neglect of both, he fell, being overcome by the fear of death, and the love of life.

“ 39. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words.”

The simplicity and plainness of Christ in his prayers is an important lesson, and of great use and advantage. A Christian who prays to God, is not an orator, who would persuade by his eloquence, but a beggar, who would move to compassion by his poverty and humility. These speak plainly and without ornament : and Jesus speaks thus to God, because he has clothed himself with our humility and poverty.

“ 40. And when he returned, he found them asleep again ; (for their eyes were heavy;) neither wist they what to answer him.”

The good Shepherd cannot forget his sheep, knowing their weakness. He ceases not to watch over them and for them, though they cannot watch one hour with him. There was nothing for these disciples to answer, but there was enough for their spiritual improvement, and particularly for that of Peter, who ought to have profited by this second admonition, in acknowledging his own weakness, in

humbling himself, and begging that strength which he had not.

“41. And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”

Jesus Christ, who is holiness itself, is just going to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, on purpose to recover sinners out of the hands of the devil. ‘The hour is come, so much dreaded by the flesh, but earnestly desired by the spirit for the glory of God. We ought, with calmness and tranquillity, to expect those grievous events with which we are threatened: they cannot happen, but by the appointment of God, and at the hour prefixed by him.

“42. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.”

Jesus always suffered beforehand the pains and torments which were designed to be inflicted on him, because he always foresaw them. It is but a moment since Christ, clothed with our weakness, was, as it were, oppressed, overwhelmed, and sunk beneath it: but now, being filled with his own strength, he goes to meet death, and supports and animates his disciples. A man left to his own strength at one time, and fortified by the grace of Christ at another, is no longer the same person: he could then do nothing; he can now do all things.

SECT. VI.—*The Kiss of Judas. Christ Apprehended. The Flight of the Disciples.*

“43. ¶ And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders.”

An apostle at the head of the enemies of Christ, what a mission is this! not to preach salvation, but to destroy the Saviour. We see here but too lively a picture of apostates, who have no sooner deserted from the church but they persecute it, put themselves at the head of conspiracies against the higher powers, and breathe nothing but violence, rebellion, and treason.

“44. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely.”

The mystical body of Christ, as well as its head, has its Judases. It is but too often betrayed with a kiss of peace, by false appearances of virtue, by calumnies spread abroad in soft language, and by deceitful pretences of peace, and of the interests of the church: but it has also some faithful members, who imitate the meekness, quietness, and peaceable disposition of their Head.

“45. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, Master; and kissed him.”

There is greater patience exercised in suffering the false caresses of a traitor, who owes his all to us, than in bearing the ill treatment of a professed enemy. It happens but seldom that we have occasion to en-

dure the greater instances of treachery ; but throughout the whole course of our life, we meet with continual occasions of enduring little artifices, dissimulations, deceits under colour of friendship, and infidelities under the veil of intimacy and confidence : it is hereby that we are to honour Christ, and that we have an opportunity of imitating his goodness, in suffering without anger and complaint, and adoring Jesus Christ betrayed by a kiss of peace.

“ 46. And they laid their hands on him, and took him.”

Jesus, seized as a slave, in order to deliver us from bondage, and to obtain for us the glorious liberty of the sons of God, well deserves to receive our homage in that condition. We honour this confinement or captivity of Christ, not only when we endure the like ourselves, justly or unjustly, with meekness and patience, looking at Jesus under these circumstances ; but also when we love to visit prisoners, in order to relieve and assist them, and to encourage them to bear like Christians the loss of their liberty, in honour and imitation of Christ a prisoner, and by the spirit of repentance and mortification. The more difficult it is to bear this state as one ought, the more ought we to apply ourselves to those who are under it, and give them our assistance, to the end that their affliction may not be that of a reprobate, but of a Christian.

“ 47. And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.”

The resistance of nature does not last long. A Christian is not a soldier of the world, to defend

himself after a worldly manner; but a soldier of Christ, who is to defend himself like his Master, only by suffering with patience, and rendering good for evil. Christ permits Peter to transgress this rule, that he may have an opportunity of giving a more eminent example of it himself, by healing this person.

“ 48. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me?”

Jesus was pleased not only to suffer the punishment of a thief, but also to bear the shame and ignominy due to such a person. To be thus calm and unmoved in the midst of so many provocations, is not the effect of any human courage, or of a common grace, but only of the grace of the God-man, whom the Word, in which he subsists, always conducts by his light, and always animates with his power.

“ 49. I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.”

It was only out of obedience that Christ avoided confinement during his life, as he suffered it out of obedience at the appointed time. When a man suffers it with him, for having been faithful to God, and without having drawn it unseasonably upon himself, he is then the prisoner of God and of Jesus Christ. He who suffers according to God’s appointment has this consolation, that he can justly say, I fulfil the Scriptures, the designs of God, and the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh, “ for his body’s sake, which is the church.”

“ 50. And they all forsook him, and fled.”

Let us not at all wonder to see Jesus Christ forsaken by men, since he came to bear the punishment of men who had forsaken God, and to merit for them the blessing not to be forsaken by him. Nothing is the cause of greater mortification to Christ, than to be betrayed and sold by one friend, to be denied by another, and to be forsaken by all the rest, being so worthy as he was to be constantly loved. Hereby he teaches us what stress is to be laid upon the friendship of men who are not entirely devoted to God, and with what patience we ought to bear such acts of treachery from them.

" 51. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: 52. And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked."

This accident, which seems to be of no consequence, serves to discover the power of Christ, and his great care and concern for his apostles. 1. He thereby admonishes Peter, that he ought to fly from the occasion, and not expose himself to temptation; these people having a design to seize all the disciples of our Lord. 2. He by this discovers the same danger to the rest, and advises them likewise to flee. 3. He shows them that it was by his power that they escaped the danger. 4. That even that person, who by their means is exposed thereto, escapes from it by the appointment of providence, and because he himself would suffer alone.

SECT. VII.—*Jesus led to Caiaphas, Condemned, and Abused.*

“ 53. ¶ And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests, and the elders, and the scribes.”

Jesus appears as a criminal before the ecclesiastical tribunal. How different are things to the eyes of faith from what they appear to the eyes of the world! There can be nothing more august than this assembly, if we judge of it by the state and profession of those who compose it; here holiness, authority, and learning seem to be united and consulting together: and yet, in reality, it is no better than a sacrilegious meeting, and a cabal of murderers. The criminals usurp the place of the Judge, and the Judge is arraigned and condemned as a criminal.

“ 54. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.”

A man never exposes himself to temptation without danger. Human engagements are attended with great difficulties, and the indiscreet advance of one false step has very often dreadful consequences. Peter has rashly boasted of his courage, his honour is at stake, he will by no means go back, and nothing is wanting on his part to his destruction. But it is much better for a man to retreat and humble himself for his fault, than thus blindly to pursue it to the last.

“ 55. And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus, to put him to death; and found none:”

It is a double blindness, to reject so many true

witnesses of the innocence of Christ, and to seek for false ones against him. What can be expected of a judge who becomes a party, and is so much blinded by passion that he cannot conceal it? Let us learn of Christ to bear the injustice done us in suits at law, with meekness and silence, in case there be no remedy, and the public interest do not oblige us to speak.

“ 56. For many bare false witness against him; but their witness agreed not together.”

What innocence can ever complain of the like injustice, after having seen that of our blessed Saviour exposed to this? Such is this divine innocency, that falsehood itself cannot invent any thing which is capable of tarnishing it. It is no ordinary moderation, to neglect the advantage which may be taken of a testimony plainly found to be false, and to forbear covering the false witness with shame and confusion. Christ follows none of these natural resentments, on purpose to moderate them in us, and to teach us to suppress them after his example, when the public good, or the glory of God requires it.

“ 57. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, 58. We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. 59. But neither so did their witness agree together.”

The greatest truths misunderstood pass frequently for blasphemies, and are the occasion of great disturbances and transports of passion. There is no kind of persecution whatever which Christ has not suffered, sanctified, and consecrated in his own per-

son. An orthodox teacher ought to comfort himself with his example, when, in order to persecute him, men falsify his opinions, writings, and doctrine, and by the help of calumny attribute a bad one to him.

" 60. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing : what is it which these witness against thee?"

Jesus astonishes and confounds his judge by his silence and patience : but there is a very great difference betwixt confounding and converting. It is no small humiliation and mortification, to see ourselves deserted by those who are most obliged to defend us : how much greater is it then, to see them at the head of our enemies ! This is what Jesus Christ teaches us to bear without bitterness, animosity, or the least desire of revenge.

" 61. But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again, the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

The love of life renders the generality of men eloquent before their judges : the desire which Christ has to sacrifice his, causes him, like a victim, not so much as to open his mouth. He justifies us before his Father, in suffering himself to be condemned before men ; he repairs our innocence in not defending his own ; and pleads our cause so much the better before the supreme and eternal tribunal in heaven, as he seems to betray his own by his silence before this unjust tribunal. Happy that person who follows him at a distance at least, and in the disposition of his heart ! My God, how many are there, who, like this high priest, interrogate the eternal truth,

without knowing it, or with a design to dishonour and persecute it! When we consult it with a double heart, it either answers not at all, or else in such a manner as to blind and harden us the more. Let us examine our own hearts, before we undertake to inquire into the truth, that we may know whether they are in a condition to hearken to it, and to profit by its answers.

“ 62. And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

Jesus shows, by this modest and courageous answer, that his silence is not a silence proceeding from fear or want of power. He admonishes his judge, by intimating to him that he is to be his. This is a kind of protestation against the violence and injustice which his sovereign dignity suffers; and an appeal against the abuse of this inferior court, to the last tribunal. It belongs to none but God to appeal to himself, and to join the authority of a supreme judge with the humility of a criminal.

“ 63. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?”

That very thing which ought to enlighten this judge, finishes and completes his blindness, through the bad disposition of his heart: so true is it, that another voice, and other ears besides those of the body are requisite, in order to our hearing with profit the truths of salvation. The great are generally offended and scandalized at great truths, instead of profiting by them; the reason is, because they have great passions. The truth of the last judgment, which ought to make the deepest impression upon

the mind of a bishop, a judge, or a prince, is that which they are least willing to hear, when they are not really the servants of God.

“ 64. Ye have heard the blasphemy : what think ye ? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.”

Let us adore Jesus Christ, condemned by his own people, in order to save that very people. He is judged by them all in general as unworthy to live : but they are the iniquities of us all which condemn him by their mouth. After this, who can wonder to see good men condemned by the world ? Yes, Lord, thou art indeed guilty of death for our sins, because thy love caused thee to take them upon thyself, and thou wast pleased to become the victim for them. How then can I possibly avoid death, I who have deserved it by my own sins !

“ 65. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy : and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.”

The image of the invisible God refuses not, for our sakes, to be dishonoured by the most unworthy treatment. All his senses suffer. 1. His sight, by their covering his face. 2. His hearing, by their blasphemies. 3. His smelling, by the nastiness of their spittle. 4. His feeling, by their buffeting him, and the blows given by these servants. 5. His taste, by the blood which proceeded from these blows, &c. This is a dreadful motive of humiliation for the sinner, who seeks only to gratify his senses ; and it is more so for the proud and revengeful person, who cannot bear the least injury, and is a mere idolater of his false honour.

SECT. VIII.—*St. Peter's Denial and Repentance.*

“ 66. ¶ And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest:”

Presumption, curiosity, and unprofitable conversation, draw Peter into the occasion of his fall. When a man can be serviceable to his friends, under their disgraces and persecutions for religion, he may then expose himself to some danger upon their account: but to do it when he cannot serve them in the least, is to forget that he is weak, and that he ought, out of humility, to avoid danger as much as possible, and not to expose himself thereto out of curiosity or presumption.

“ 67. And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. 68. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.”

What! not know him, who, by the eucharist, had just given himself to him, and was at that very time sacrificing himself for him? There are but too many who imitate Peter, in denying Christ by their works as soon as ever they leave the holy table, and in being ashamed before men of his truths, his gospel, and his friends. Men look upon it as a small thing, under the fair and specious pretexts of wisdom, advantage, and other prudential considerations, to dissemble the knowledge which they have of the innocence of those who are rendered odious to the world, or their agreement with them in the same sentiments and opinions. We shall one day see

what judgment God will pass upon this conduct. The silence of a good man and a friend, is a piece of treachery, which is sometimes more prejudicial, and of more pernicious consequence, than the accusation of a declared enemy.

“ 69. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. 70. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.”

The experience of a first, and even of a second fall, is not sufficient to convince a presumptuous person, or to make him sensible of his danger. The danger is never small, when the weakness is great, and a man depends upon himself. A silly woman, a word, or even a look, is able to overturn the chief pillars of the church, if they are not well founded upon the love of God, and the contempt of the world, and of all its false advantages.

“ 71. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.”

Is this the man who said, “ Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ the Son of the living God.” What knowledge, what faith, what zeal soever a man has, he may lose it all in a moment, and become like Peter. Presumption was the cause of his fall: let humility support us, and conserve in us the gifts of God.

“ 72. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.”

In vain does the cock crow to the ears of Peter; in vain do all preachers cry aloud to awaken the sinner, unless the grace of Christ open his understanding, his memory, and his heart, and draw from thence the tears of repentance. Peter's tongue utters not a word, but his heart speaks by his eyes. A true penitent ought to begin by silence, especially if his tongue has been the instrument of his sin. Such a person should speak to God by his love, and to men by his tears. It is to his heart that God speaks, when it is touched with a sense of his sins; and it is his heart which must speak to God, if it desires to be cured.

CHAPTER XV.

SECT. I.—*Jesus brought before Pilate. Barabbas. The clamour of the Jews against Christ.*

“ 1. AND straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes, and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.”

Nothing can appear more regular in itself than this assembly; but the more lawful its authority is, the more criminal is the abuse thereof to the oppression of innocence. When the supreme judges betray their trust, they are more guilty than the inferior; because there is no remedy or appeal for those whom they oppress. Jesus is delivered to the secular power and to the Gentiles, as a profane and impious person, because he is a universal criminal, who bears the sins both of Jews and Gentiles, of all states

and conditions of men, and because he is to be condemned in the place of all, and to die for all. He refuses no judge, and declines no tribunal : because he looks upon himself as already condemned by his Father, and upon men as being, by their injustice, only the executioners of his sovereign justice.

“ 2. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the king of the Jews? And he answering, said unto him, Thou sayest it.”

Christ bears testimony to his own royal dignity, but without saying any thing which might deliver him from the hands of his enemies. It is very difficult for a man not to own and declare that he is a king, when such an acknowledgment and declaration draw after them honour, respect, and every thing due to royalty. But when royalty itself is become a crime, then he who dares own and acknowledge it must despise life. Christ never confessed himself a king till he found himself in the hands of his enemies, because it was by the cross that he was to reign.

“ 3. And the chief priests accused him of many things ; but he answered nothing.”

Having seen Jesus betrayed and delivered up by one of his apostles, we cannot wonder at all to see him accused by the chief priests. This consummate corruption in the chief ministers of religion, makes it evident that it was high time that the Saviour should appear in the world, that the true priest should come to offer his sacrifice, and that grace should be shed abroad in the heart, as the sovereign remedy of sin.

“ 4. And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing ? behold how many things they witness against thee.”

Our sins shut the mouth of Christ. He answered nothing, because he was to answer for us, who had nothing to answer for ourselves. The silence of the person accused confounds both the malice of the accusers, and the cowardice of the prevaricating judge, when this silence is supported by innocence.

“ 5. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.”

The silence of Jesus proceeds from his owning all our crimes before his Father, his only lawful judge. Concern, passion, fear of death, love of reputation, and desire to be justified, make an accused person speak who has nothing at liberty but his tongue: but even the tongue itself of Christ is not at liberty, being under a kind of confinement from his meekness, his patience, his wisdom, his humility, his obedience, and his quality of victim, which make him even in love with shame and with the cross.

“ 6. ¶ Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired.”

This custom is a type of the deliverance of all mankind at the feast of the immolation of Christ the true paschal victim. It is a new benefit, that he would not be released at the feast of the passover; as it was one before, that he was willing to be redeemed at his presentation in the temple. There could have been no salvation for us, if the Saviour himself had not vouchsafed to be the sacrifice for it.

“ 7. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.
8. And the multitude, crying aloud, began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them.”

Who could have believed any other, but that these people, who had so often seen the miracles of the Son of God, and had been loaded with his benefits, were going to speak in his favour, and to plead his innocence in order to procure his release? But nothing can be favourable to him, whom his Father has condemned for our sins.

“ 9. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? 10. For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.”

How much mischief does envy cause, when ecclesiastical persons suffer themselves to be possessed therewith! That which it first began to do against the Prince of pastors, the same will it continue to do against his ministers throughout all succeeding ages, and will never cease to pursue them till the end of the world. It was the cause of the death of Christ even from the beginning of the world, since it was by the envy of the devil that sin first entered into it, and since envy was that which made him “a murderer from the beginning.” Wretched and miserable are his children, who accomplish the desires of their father. Miserable are those Cains who envy their brethren, and thereby become their murderers, at least in the desire of their hearts.

“ 11. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.”

The people follow the bad example, and the sentiments of wicked priests, rather than those of the good. The envy of the priests, the credulity of the people, and the policy of the timorous and selfish magistrate, conspire to set Jesus Christ below Barabbas.

“ 12. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews ?”

What ! to have Jesus Christ in his hands, and not know what to do with him ! How many Christians are in the like condition ! What shall we not do with him, provided we have faith ! To what purpose is he not useful, who is the Saviour, the Sacrifice, the Priest, and the Mediator of men ! What duties have we not to pay him ! What requests have we not to make to him ! What ought we not to present and offer to him ! There are abundance of worldly people who know not what to do with Christ, that is, with their faith in Christ : it incommodes and perplexes them ; they are unwilling to deliver it up openly ; and they are likewise unwilling to follow it. When a person in authority, who is devoted to the service of God, has Jesus Christ and the interests of his kingdom within his power, he is far from saying, What shall I do with this king ? For he knows very well, that he ought to use his utmost endeavours to advance his kingdom in the world, and to make his own authority subservient to that end.

“ 13. And they cried out again, Crucify him. 14. Then Pilate said unto them, Why ? what evil hath he done ? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.”

Faithless and ungrateful people ! who make no other return but the punishment of the cross for all the favours and benefits they had received. How many more have Christians received, who yet cease not to crucify him afresh by their sins ! Let us not pretend to say, that we would never have preferred

Barabbas before the Son of God : for we do the same thing whenever we prefer our will to his, our own satisfaction before his law, the world to his truth, and our own interests before the duties of religion.

“ 15. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.”

Observe here the several crimes of Pilate:—1. Ambition renders him a coward. 2. He releases a murderer. 3. He prefers him before the Author of life. 4. He abandons an innocent person. 5. He causes him to be scourged. 6. He unjustly delivers him up to his enemies. And, 7. He causes him to be crucified.—How many sins do too great a regard to men, and the fear of the world, cause a judge to commit, who is not firmly settled in the love of justice ! In order to his being the instrument of abundance of mischief, it is not necessary that he should be altogether corrupt ; it is sufficient if he be desirous only of pleasing some particular person. One single passion makes a man a slave, and prevails alone above a great number of good qualities. Complaisance is one of the most dangerous ; because it seems to be a passion attending a good man, and because it has nothing in it which is shocking, nothing but what is gentle and good-natured, insomuch that it often passes even for gratitude, duty, and prudence.

SECT. II.—*Christ Scourged, Crowned with Thorns, and Insulted.*

“ 16. ¶ And the soldiers led him away into the hall called Pretorium ; and they call together the whole band.”

Let us adore the Son of God abandoned to the insolence of the soldiers. He is sometimes worse treated in a company of gentlemen, among the great pretenders to reason, than amidst this whole band of cruel soldiers. He suffers, at the hands of these, that ill treatment to which his Father condemned him; and he suffers it in the body, wherein he was to suffer it: but the others, as far as lies in their power, debase and humble him in his glorious and immortal state, by their infidelity with respect to his mysteries, and contrary to the design of God, who would have him honoured by the faith of his church.

“ 17. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head,”

Let us honour Jesus Christ, dishonoured in that very quality which ought to have been most respected and honoured in him. In this mystery he expiates the vanity and excess of the great ones of the world, who spend, in clothes and superfluous ornaments, not only that which is due to the necessities of his members, but even that of which they are frequently stripped and spoiled. All the crowns of the earth, and the purple of kings, how bright and glorious soever they be, must pay homage to this crown of thorns and to this purple. The homage which these require of them is, that they use their utmost endeavours in causing their people to serve Jesus Christ, maintaining and supporting the truths of Christianity, and the faithful ministers of the church, with all the authority which God has given them.

“ 18. And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews !”

He expiates the pride of those who exact or receive from their subjects such honours as are almost divine. To observe in the church the posture and countenance of abundance of Christian professors, one would take them rather for Jews or pagan soldiers, who insult and mock Christ, than for Christians, who come to adore their Saviour and their King. Would to God the clergy themselves did not contribute to this irreverence, either by their cowardice in bearing with it, or by their negligence in instructing others, or by their own bad example.

“ 19. And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and, bowing their knees, worshipped him.”

He expiates that excessive resentment which men have of the least injuries which are done them, their inclination to revenge, and the transports of their passions. The insults of these pagan soldiers, who know not Christ, affect him less sensibly in this day of his humiliations and sufferings, than the carelessness, forgetfulness, and irreligion of Christians, who make profession that they believe in him, and look upon him as their Saviour. Let us pray to God, and worship him in Jesus Christ; but let us do it in such a manner as is worthy both of God and of Christ. If to bow the knees be to worship Christ, these heathens do it as well as we. It is the heart which prays and worships; the modest and reserved behaviour is but the sign, and, as it were, the visible sacrament of the invisible adoration.

SECT. III.—*The Cross carried. Jesus Crucified.
The Thieves.*

“ 20. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.”

A God, become the jest and sport of his creatures, expiates the sacrilege of his creatures, who make a jest of God and religion. Every one has his particular way of making a mock at these, which is either more or less criminal: some do it in a more gross and sensible, others in a more private and spiritual manner; ecclesiastical persons after one fashion, and worldly people after another; some with deliberate purpose and out of an extravagant gaiety of mind, others, through carelessness, ignorance, or custom, and, as it were, without perceiving it. The wicked do but too nearly resemble these soldiers; if they cease to mock Christ, it is only in order to crucify him by other sins.

“ 21. And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.”

Happy is that person who bears his cross, in following Christ, though against his own inclination! There are scarce any crosses and afflictions in the world, which are purely voluntary, and which a man would embrace by his own choice: but that which, in its original is, as it were, forced, becomes voluntary by acceptance. The silence of this man is to us a testimony of his patience, his peaceableness, and his adherence to the cross of Christ; or at least a lesson, which teaches us what we ought to do under those afflictions which may fall upon us.

“ 22. And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, ‘The place of a scull.’”

The true Isaac carries the wood for his sacrifice to the very place appointed for his immolation. He suffers, and offers himself without the gate, (Heb. xiii. 12.) to show, that we must expect our sanctification and salvation from his sacrifice only, and not from the sacrifices offered in Jerusalem according to the law; and that it is a universal sacrifice, which is to redeem, sanctify, and save, not the Jewish people alone, but all the nations of the earth.

“ 23. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh; but he received it not.”

All humanity is changed into cruelty, to augment the sufferings of Christ, and yet the sinner would fain have every thing changed into delights for his own ease and gratification. Christ tastes a little of this bitter, intoxicating, and strengthening liquor, that he may suffer the bitterness of it; he refuses the rest, to show that he was resolved to endure all the pains of the cross, to offer his sacrifice with a perfect freedom of mind, and not to defer the moment of his death, and the completion of his sacrifice, by repairing his strength. How wonderful, O Jesus, is the whole economy of thy sufferings! It is peculiar to thee alone, to suffer with this freedom of mind, this strict conformity to the will of God thy Father, and this insatiate love of sufferings.

“ 24. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man shoudl take.”

Christ is humbled even in his garments, which

had been often the instruments of his goodness and mercy towards his people. Ecclesiastical revenues being the patrimony of the poor, are in respect of them to be looked upon as the garments of Christ, who had no other goods upon earth, but that only which served to cover his body. What then can we think when we see them become the lot and portion of soldiers, but only that this part of Christ's passion is renewed daily among Christians? When clergymen by profession, are likewise professed gamesters, though they have no revenues but what belong to the church, do they not justly deserve to be looked upon as soldiers, who, at the very foot of the cross, cast lots for the patrimony of Christ crucified, and the garments of his members?

“ 25. And it was the third hour; and they crucified him.”

Who will give us a heart worthy to adore Jesus Christ nailed to the cross as a victim laid upon the altar, and there offering to his Father, in behalf of his church, the grand sacrifice of his love and of his life? This cross is not only the altar of sacrifice, but also the pulpit of the true teacher, the nuptial bed of the bridegroom who produces us from his wounds, and the tribunal of the sovereign Judge. Every one of these qualities requires particular duties, which we ought carefully to study, and to pay him with fidelity.

“ 26. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

Death is so far from destroying the regal power in Christ, as it does in earthly kings, that it is, on the contrary, the very foundation thereof. He becomes the King of the true Jews, of the Israel of

God, and of all nations, by overcoming their true enemies, namely, death, the devil, and sin, and obtaining for them the true salvation, and the right to reign with him. Let me not be so unjust, O Jesus, my King and my Deliverer, as to dispute with thee the sovereignty of my heart, which has cost thee so dear.

“ 27. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.”

In death, that which passes before the eyes of men may be common to the righteous and the wicked: but that which passes in the sight of God is very different. Those who have any ambition to reign with Christ, must expect to be crucified with him; and even those who have no such ambition, will, notwithstanding, be certainly crucified in some manner or other. The former, with the cross of Christ purchase heaven; the latter, hell with the cross of the devil: all Christians and all mankind are thus divided.

“ 28. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.”

Christ, by being numbered with the transgressors at the time of his death, merits for us the favour of being placed in the number of children, upon our receiving our own death in the spirit of humility and repentance. The sentiments which these people have of Christ crucified, teach us not to fall in with the judgment of the greatest number. He passes for a notorious malefactor in the opinion of all, except a very few who dare not declare their thoughts. We frequently judge of the eternal state of a sinner by the manner of his death; but God perhaps judges

very differently concerning it: that person dies the death of malefactors who is an elect of God.

SECT. IV.—*Blasphemies. Darkness. Christ cries out, and dies.*

“ 29. ¶ And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, 30. Save thyself, and come down from the cross.”

He who is fastened to the cross out of obedience and love, will never come down from it of his own accord. It is not sufficient that a man live under mortification and the cross, he must likewise die therein. It is sometimes a great temptation to those who suffer for the sake of Christ, to see that their sufferings are an occasion of dishonouring God, and insulting piety and religion. It is their part to continue faithful to God in their state and condition; it is God’s to take care to put a stop to the blasphemy, and to secure the honour of piety.

“ 31. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking, said among themselves, with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.”

If Christ had saved himself, he could not then have saved others. There is a time to suffer, and a time to act. It is not always a proper time to repress the insults which are made against the truth: there are some seasons when it is better to suffer and to be silent, than to work miracles and to make apologies. Human reason cannot comprehend how any one can save himself from suffering, when he does not save himself at all: and it imagines, that it argues very justly in concluding that Christ wrought

only false miracles for others, since he wrought none for himself. O cross of my Saviour, it is in many different ways that thou confoundest the wisdom of the world !

“ 32. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.”

An earnest desire to see, is but a very ill disposition in order to believe. Had Christ descended from the cross and not died, all faith had been quite destroyed, and he could not have been either the author or finisher of it. See here another delusion of human pride, to imagine that miracles are of themselves sufficient to engage men to believe ; as if faith were not a gift of God. These men will believe, they say, if Christ save himself from death ; when they themselves had seen him raise one who had been dead four days, without any other effect than increasing in envy, incredulity, and hardness of heart. So greatly does the sinner deceive himself.

“ 33. ¶ And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.”

It is the sinner’s blindness, it is our own, which is represented by this darkness. Such is the heart which has given itself its death-wound by means of sin, and has now no other hold of God but only by some small remains of faith. Exceeding happy in its misfortune, if the light of grace return, and prevent it from expiring under its darkness. Christ hereby plainly showed, that his death was to recover the world out of the darkness of sin and error. It has recovered us out of it : for ever blessed be his holy name for this mercy.

“34. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

The cry of the heart is the prayer of charity or love, and the loud cry of Christ’s heart is the prayer of his love, which causes him to give his life for us, and which implores the greatest mercy for his church. Hear this cry, O my God, and let it be the peace of thy church. Christ is forsaken by his Father, on no other account, but only because the sinner deserved to be so, and to the end that he may not. Strange and wonderful dereliction this! which, exposing Christ to the rage of his creatures, unites him to his Father in a more close, holy, and divine manner, as his true victim. Why? It is because God thy Father loved mankind so exceedingly; it is because thou, O Jesus my Saviour, gavest thyself up to his justice, that thou mightest be the victim of the world; it is because thy Spirit had forsaken sinners, and could not possibly be restored to them but by the effusion of thy adorable blood.

“35. And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.”

The last words of Christ are so much the more worthy of a singular regard and reverence, because they are dishonoured by these impious wretches, and because they discover to us the most holy dispositions of Jesus Christ, his greatest internal sufferings, and the most violent impression of God, as being infinite justice and holiness itself, upon his Son made sin, that is, the victim of sin for us. He bears alone all the affronts and insults of the priests and the people,

of Jews and Gentiles, and of the companions and witnesses of his sufferings, because he alone bears, expiates, and destroys all the sins of the whole world.

“36. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.”

Malice persecutes Christ to the very last. He expiates the sharpness and bitterness of our words, and the licentiousness of our tongue, by what he suffers in his own. See here all the consolation the creatures give their Creator whilst he is suffering for them: namely, infidelity, sharpness, and bitterness. The sharpness and bitterness of a heart full of gall, animosity, and revenge against one’s brother, are, without comparison, more grievous to Christ than those here tasted by him, which are only an emblem of the other. It is by the sweetness and gentleness of charity that Christ requires men should comfort him in his sufferings.

“37. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.”

This cry is a testimony of Christ’s divinity, at the same time that his death gives one of his humanity. The cry of our sins gives him death; his cry, which offers his death to his Father, delivers us from death. All nature ought to be annihilated at the death of its God; but he requires no more than the annihilation and death of sin in us. Let us pay him at least adoration, thanksgiving, humiliation, love, and all the other duties of which the heart of man is capable towards his God dying for him.

SECT. V.—*The Miracles after Christ's Death.*
The Centurion. The holy Women.

“38. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.”

Behold all the mysteries which are just going to be discovered. The veil of the true sanctuary will now immediately be opened to men, by the rending of the veil of Christ’s flesh. The death of the true victim puts an end to the figurative sacrifices, and to all the carnal righteousness of the Jewish temple. The whole earth is about to become the temple of God by the sacrifice of charity, in which alone the true righteousness consists, and by the sacrifice of the eucharist, which will every where renew the memory of that which is just now accomplished on mount Calvary, and will publish this truth in all places, that Christ died for the salvation of the whole world.

“39. ¶ And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.”

A powerful and miraculous cry this! It opens the eyes and the heart of the centurion, because for him it is accompanied with the internal cry of grace which is represented by it. There is a loud cry at the death of Christ; there was the same at the resurrection of Lazarus: to show, that our blessed Saviour’s death was to merit for us the grace to rise to the true life. The faith and confession of the centurion are the first-fruits of the faith of the Gentiles, and a prophetic sign of their being preferred before the

Jews. As Christ during his whole life gave himself to the Jews: so immediately upon his death he begins to declare for the Gentiles by this first grace.

" 40. There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; 41. (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem."

Grace, which is the fruit of the death of Jesus Christ, triumphs in the weaker sex, by rendering these women faithful in their attendance at the cross, to teach man to glory in his own weakness, if he would receive the strength of Jesus Christ. These holy women satisfy the bashfulness and modesty of their sex, in keeping at some distance from this spectacle: they satisfy their love and their duty, in not losing sight of the Saviour of the world during his sacrifice. The love of life, and the fear of death, are the things which most strongly oppose the obligation under which we lie to follow Jesus Christ suffering and dying for us: the grace to be freed from those obstacles is the fruit of having followed Christ in his life by imitating him, and of having liberally distributed alms among his poor members, as these pious women had done.

SECT. VI.—*Joseph of Arimathea. The Burial.*

" 42. ¶ And now, when the even was come, (because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath,) 43. Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus."

Whoever with faith expects and waits for the kingdom of God, exposes himself boldly to the greatest perils of this present life. God knows how to find proper persons for his work, how dangerous soever it may be, when he designs to employ them therein. None but Christ could have found friends of condition after such a death; because none but he could give himself such by the sovereign power which he had over hearts. None of Christ's known and professed disciples have any share in his burial, because it was requisite there should be unsuspected witnesses of the certainty of his death; nor have his apostles any thing to do in it, because by their cowardice they deserved to be deprived of this honour; nor even Peter himself, because he was taken up in bewailing his own death.

“ 44. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and, calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead.”

The time of Christ's death is not subjected to the general and common laws, but solely to the will of God, and even to the power of the person who dies. How wonderful is the wisdom of God in the methods which it takes, almost in an imperceptible manner, to have witnesses of the truth of his Son's death, and to obviate the objections of those who were to deny it!

“ 45. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.”

This faithful disciple is paid in ready money for his fidelity and courage, by his receiving as a gift the victim of God, the treasure of the church, the sacred bud from whence salvation is to spring, and the precious grain of wheat which contains the kingdom of

God. We seldom expose ourselves to great dangers for the sake of God, without being rewarded immediately, at least by the comfort of having done our duty, and of having secured to ourselves, in some measure, the possession of Jesus Christ to all eternity.

"46. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre."

Whoever is dead to sin with Jesus Christ, ought,
1. To receive Christ with a pure heart. 2. By the assistance of his ministers to remove himself from the place or occasions of sin wherein he was dead. 3. As it were to wrap up Christ in his heart, by preserving him therein with great care. 4. To make of his heart a living sepulchre, by the remembrance of Christ's death. 5. To hew this sepulchre out of a rock, that is, to found and root it in Christ by an unshaken faith. 6. To shut it up from the world, and the occasions of sin and distraction of mind, by retirement and silence. 7. So to order the matter, that Christ himself, by his word and grace, may be the living stone rolled unto the door of this living sepulchre.

"47. And Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Joses, beheld where he was laid."

Let us imitate these holy women, and take care like them not to lose sight of Christ, but to follow him every where by a persevering faith, and an indefatigable fidelity. In his life, in his death, at the sepulchre, every where he is our God and our Saviour, every where adorable, every where infinitely worthy to be sought after and followed. That

society is very pleasant, extremely profitable, and highly acceptable to God, which is betwixt two souls united together only to follow Christ, to seek him in the poor, to honour him in his mysteries, and mutually to assist each other in discovering where he is laid, and where they may find him, in order to perform their duty to him, either in himself or in his members.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECT. I.—*The Resurrection. The holy Women at the Sepulchre. Angels.*

“ 1. AND when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.”

Faith seeks after life in the very sepulchre of Christ, and it will find even more than it seeks, because it seeks it as it ought, and out of a principle of obedience. A solid and substantial devotion is always regular, does every thing in its proper time, and is very far from neglecting what is commanded for that which is not. The Spirit of God, which guides these holy women, permits them not to dispense with the observance even of a dying law, that so they may perform a service to Christ which could be deferred but a very little while.

“ 2. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.”

True charity, as well as faith, is active and diligent: and neither death is capable to extinguish it,

nor grief to render it slothful and feeble. The diligence of these women will not have the success they promise themselves from it, but it will have something which is much better. The work is done, in the sight of God, when once a man puts himself in a readiness to do it: good dispositions are never lost; the endeavours of charity are never fruitless and unsuccessful.

“3. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?”

Love regards no difficulty nor danger, it considers nothing but the will and desire of the beloved object. A person must needs have a very great stock of faith, to see difficulties, which in all appearance are inextricable, and yet, notwithstanding, to go forward trusting entirely to Providence. It is prudence to foresee difficulties; but it is a prudence more holy and evangelical to obey the call of God, when he calls us to any work, and to depend upon him for those means whereof we ourselves are utterly unprovided.

“4. And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.”

God generally removes the greatest obstacles in those affairs, which a man undertakes for his sake alone with courage and faith. Human measures often fail even in the easiest undertakings: those measures which God makes use of, for those persons who in the most difficult undertakings put their trust in him, never fail. It is upon him alone that we must on all occasions continually depend.

“5. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.”

He, who, by retiring from the world, as it were, buries himself with Christ, finds therein true comfort and consolation from God, though he is frequently not sensible of it at first. It is as much out of modesty as surprise, that these holy women are alarmed and affrighted at the sight of a young man shining with light. The appearance of an angel ought to be suspected by a soul, which has no reason to think itself worthy of such a favour; and which knows, both that the devil often transforms himself into an angel of light, and that even a man may become a devil to seduce and destroy it.

“ 6. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.”

A man ought not to bury himself in retirement, unless it be in order to seek there Jesus Christ crucified. This way of life is frightful at first; but this fright is soon changed into holy delight and satisfaction. It is in retirement that one learns by experience that Christ is risen indeed, by partaking of his new life, by living on the hopes of rising with him, and, by means of faith, tasting beforehand the joys of heaven.

“ 7. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.”

It is in retirement that Jesus, risen again, goes continually before those who seek him crucified, dead, and buried, in giving them an example, and removing all the difficulties which lie in their way: it is there that they are confirmed and strengthened in the

hope of seeing him one day in the glory of his resurrection. God takes care to comfort true penitents, and to raise the spirits of those who, like Peter, are cast down at the remembrance of their faults.

“ 8. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.”

God suffers the most fervent to experience the inconstancy, fears, and infirmities of this life, on purpose to make them desirous of another. He obliges men to purchase the graces and consolations of this life by inward pains and troubles, every one in his way.

SECT. II.—*Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene and the two Disciples.*

“ 9. ¶ Now, when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.”

The constancy, fidelity, and perseverance of Mary Magdalene at the cross, in some measure deserved to be rewarded with the first visit of Christ risen from the dead. God is pleased in a particular manner to favour those who have been faithful to him in time of persecution, and have not been ashamed of his cross, on purpose to show how faithful he is to his promises. The service of the devil and sin has its flattering and deceitful sweets, which terminate at last in the utmost misery: the service of Jesus Christ and of righteousness is attended with crosses, but such as are full of spiritual unction and hope, and which end in solid joys, and in the vision of God himself.

“ 10. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.”

God here makes choice of a faithful soul, rather than of an apostle, to be the messenger of joy, comfort, and encouragement, to afflicted and dejected minds, that he may honour fidelity, and teach pastors to prefer it before mighty works and extraordinary gifts. Jesus Christ, by the double instance of Mary Magdalene and of the apostles, confirms this important truth, which he had laid as part of the foundation of his morality, “ Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

“ 12. ¶ After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.”

How fervent is the charity of the good Shepherd ! He follows his sheep which fly from him, to bring them back to his flock, and applies himself as carefully to every one of them, as if it were the only one he had. The Shepherd risen from the dead, gathers his sheep together which his death had scattered abroad : thus persecutions separate and disperse the disciples of Christ, causing them to partake of his cross and death, in order to be one day re-united in the participation of his glorious life.

“ 13. And they went and told it unto the residue : neither believed they them.”

The resurrection is the most difficult mystery to be believed : it is properly the faith of Christians, and the foundation of their religion. This incredulity of the apostles is a fault, but a fault which is

beneficial to the church and to the faith itself. The more backward the apostles are, in believing the resurrection of the Son of God, the fitter will they be to procure it credit, and to be the witnesses of it. God is a most admirable architect ; he makes every thing, good or bad, serviceable to his building : but the good use which he makes of bad materials is his praise, without being their justification.

SECT. III.—*Christ's appearance to the Eleven.*
Their Mission. *Miracles promised.* *The Ascension.*

“ 14. ¶ Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.”

Jesus leaves not his elect in unbelief or hardness of heart : he does not flatter them in their sin, but makes them bear the shame of it in this life. After a promise so often repeated to the apostles of rising the third day, besides the prophecies and figures concerning it which he had explained to them, this was an inexcusable incredulity. How much more so then is that of the wicked, after such a number of miracles, after the faith of all nations and of all ages !

“ 15. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.
16. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Observe here the effects of the resurrection :—1. The universal mission. 2. The calling of the Gentiles. 3. The faith, sanctification, and salvation of the elect. 4. The infidelity, obduracy, and dam-

nation of the reprobate.—Not to believe, is enough to condemn us; but to believe, is not enough to justify us, unless we believe with that lively faith which worketh by love, which includes and fulfils the whole law. Christ ordinarily requires nothing but faith here in order to salvation, and, in the two following verses, in order to the gift of healing and miraculous works: the reason is, because faith being the foundation, the root and the bud of all other virtues and necessary dispositions, denotes and comprehends them all.

“ 17. And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;”

The name of Jesus is terrible to the devil. It is a weapon which he leaves to his church wherewith to cast him out and to subdue him, and to triumph over hell and sin even to the end of the world. It is a very great fault in Christians to put so little trust in it, to use it either too seldom, or on trivial occasions, without respect, religion, faith, or attention, or without reliance upon this promise. It is employed in casting out the devil, when it is used against all evil thoughts or impure desires, and against all his suggestions and temptations.

“ 18. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

A lively faith puts the power of God into the hands of men, casts out the devil of sin, causes them to speak the language of heaven, clears the heart of man from its venom and malignity, and cures all the faintness and sickness which proceed from sin. A

man has no reason to fear any manner of adversity, when charity has gained the ascendant in him over concupiscence.

“ 19. ¶ So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.”

The whole gospel, and all the grandeur of the Christian religion, is reducible to this, namely, “ That we have such an High Priest, who is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;” that he “ is there set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, being the Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” Heb. viii. 1, 2. ix. 24.

“ 20. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”

Could the gospel possibly end after a manner more comfortable, than with the promise of the co-operation of Christ with the ministers of his word? A co-operation both external and internal: the one by miracles and the other assistances of his providence; the other, by the operation of his grace in the heart. Our whole confidence, O my Saviour, depends upon our knowledge of thy almighty power in opening our hearts to thy word. This is the only hope of thy church. Vouchsafe, Lord, to grant her such ministers of thy word, as may deserve to have it accompanied in their mouth with the co-operation of thy grace. It is this which does all, both with

and without miracles. These are not necessary for us; but without the operation of thy healing grace we can do nothing.

THE
GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST,
ACCORDING TO
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CHAPTER I.

SECT. I.—*St. Luke's Preface.*

“ 1. FORASMUCH as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, 2. Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word ;”

It is a very great proof of the truth of religion, and of the certainty of those things which the evangelists relate, that they were written by a great number of historians, without support, pretensions, combination, or human talents; that they were written whilst they were all fresh, in the midst of the most violent opposition of the Jews against the gospel, and yet no one at that time writing any thing to the contrary; that they were written without any heat, invectives, or bitterness, though they are no other than the history of the most unjust and cruel persecution, and even death of their Master; that they were taken

from eye-witnesses, have been received by all the world, and confirmed by innumerable miracles.

“ 3. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,
4. That thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.”

St. Luke is the proper evangelist of the birth of St. John the Baptist, and of all the particulars of the incarnation, infancy, and first mysteries of Jesus Christ. A man ought neither to write nor speak concerning divine and religious matters, till he has been exactly instructed in them by persons worthy of credit; and then he must do it, not to satisfy either vanity or curiosity, but only to make known the truth. God frequently makes use of one particular occasion to enlighten the whole church; and a writing, composed by the author, only for one particular person, through the appointment, conduct, and inspiration of God, becomes a public and divine book. Let us adore, admire, and thank providence, for the care it takes about the instruction both of private persons, and of the whole church. Let us profit by all we read, as being written for every one of us.

SECT. II.—*The Angel's appearance to Zacharias.
John Baptist's Birth foretold. Zacharias Dumb.*

“ 5. ¶ There was, in the days of Herod the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. 6. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.”

Happy that marriage, where all is sacerdotal on both sides—by the consecration of the heart to God; by a disengagement from earthly riches; by a love of purity; by faithfulness to God's law; by a zeal for his glory; by constancy in prayer; by a spirit of sacrifice; and by an inviolable application to all the duties of religion. The nobility of John is founded on a long succession, not of kings nor of great captains, but of persons consecrated to God; not on the authority or wealth of his parents, but on their piety, which consists in fulfilling the law of God.

“ 7. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren; and they both were now well stricken in years.”

Mysterious is this barrenness of nature, which gives occasion to a fruitfulness of grace. Those who know how to value as they ought the blessing of the new law, which is to be a child of God and a member of Christ, afflict themselves but little at being deprived of the blessing of the old law, which consisted in having children, and giving members to the synagogue. Here is mention made of barrenness, but none of murmuring or vexation. The righteous receive the outward gifts of God with gratitude, but they can bear the want of them with submission.

“ 8. And it came to pass, that, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, 9. According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.”

One priest alone, intent on his duty, who diffuses the sweet savour of Christ, and is constant in prayer, draws down on the people more blessings than a great

number of negligent priests. A man ought to discharge all the ecclesiastical functions with the spirit of the sacred ministry, as before God, and under his immediate inspection; to perform them in order, in his proper station, without ambitiously seeking a higher; to do nothing merely of his own will, but to observe the well-established customs, as being the necessary securities of peace. This is the truth which these shadows prefigured, and these the dispositions worthy of a minister of the true temple, which is the church; and of the true incense, which is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

“ 10. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.”

Nothing is more powerful in drawing down the blessings of God, than a people well united in heart to their holy pastor in prayer. “ The time of incense,” as to Christians, is the time of prayer. This fidelity of the Jews, in respect of the figure, will condemn Christians who do not esteem the truth as they ought. Nothing is more edifying or praiseworthy than this diligent attendance of the laity.

“ 11. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.”

It is the prayer and the sacrifice of the church which draw down on her, her ministers, and her children, the favours of God, and the knowledge of his secrets and mysteries. It is to a holy bishop, or a holy priest, that God discovers himself most. Such a one is to the people the same which the angel is to this priest—a messenger, an ambassador from God, to declare his promises. The angel of the sacrifice

is not visible at the altar; but he is always present there, to carry and present the Christian people's sacrifice before the Majesty of God.

“ 12. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.”

Under illuminations, apparitions, and extraordinary manifestations, a man ought always to be afraid. The more humility accompanies the divine illumination, the greater apprehension does it give of the false light of the prince of pride. To know that he transforms himself sometimes into an angel of light, is sufficient to make us continually in fear of his seductions. Trouble produces assurance, and fear gives peace, when they proceed from humility.

“ 13. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”

Good angels comfort those whom their presence troubled at first. Good priests, mindful of the wants of the church and people, are heard both as to those of the church and as to their own, which perhaps they did not at all consider. Zacharias prayed for the Messiah, according to the spirit of the law; and he is thought worthy to have the forerunner of the Messias for his own son. The promise of a son is but a small matter, unless a man can reasonably hope that he will prove a child of grace. Zacharias receives the promise of it in this prophetic name of John, who was to be the first-fruit, the apostle, and the harbinger of Christian grace.

“ 14. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.”

To have joy in the birth of saints, and particularly in that of the forerunner of Jesus Christ, is to honour our Saviour and his grace. To promise this joy to a father, who knew no other joy but that of the Holy Ghost, is to promise him every thing for his son. The gifts of God are not a true subject of joy, but only when they are to us a pledge of his love, and of the birth or new coming of Christ in us by his Spirit. All joy which has no relation to him, is a joy of the world; a joy which comes not from heaven; a joy which we must lament.

“ 15. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb. 16. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 17. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Angels have no notion of human greatness, and are far from bringing tidings concerning any thing of that nature. The forerunner of him who came to render it contemptible, and to condemn it himself, can have no other greatness but such as makes him conformable to the Son of God in his state of humiliation. Nothing is truly great, but what is so in the sight of God. John’s greatness arises, 1. From his mortified life. 2. From the fulness of God’s Spirit in him. 3. From his zeal to make Christ known. 4. From his fidelity and courage in rebuking vice, in reviving in the Jews the spirit of the patriarchs, and preparing the hearts of the people for Jesus Christ.

Give thy church, my God, such bishops and preachers, as know and desire no other greatness but what consists in humbling themselves before thy Majesty, and in sacrificing their lives to make thee known and adored.

“ 18. ¶ And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.”

Men ought not to fear any natural impediments when the God of nature declares his will, which no obstacle can hinder. God has a right to be believed on his word alone, without any other pledge of his promise. Some persons blame this distrust of Zacharias, surprised at the appearance of an angel, and at such extraordinary news, who, even in cold blood, and on all occasions, are themselves full of distrusts and uncertainties. Diffidence is less excusable in a bishop, or in a pastor, who ought to be, as it were, God’s security with men. God permits the imperfections of the most holy, in order to promote his own glory, to confirm their grace by humility, and to comfort the weak.

“ 19. And the angel answering, said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings.”

A priest, a bishop, in serving the church, should imitate the angels, who quit not the presence of God in their employments towards men. A man of vows and prayer like Zacharias, who longed for the Messiah, whose heart was full of the prophecies of his coming, needed only the name of Gabriel to put him into the way, and to make him understand, that the

weeks foretold by the same angel to Daniel were about to be accomplished. It is good to fill our minds with the divine Scriptures: one word, on particular occasions, is sufficient to enlighten and set us right.

“ 20. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.”

The holiness of God renders him severe in punishing the least faults of the saints. What rigorous treatment then have not the wicked reason to expect? A thought, a word of distrust, is a fault, which is more considerable in those who know by experience the goodness and power of God. A silence of nine months for one distrustful word, is in God’s judgment a proportionable penance. It is thus that we may make some atonement for the guilt of such words, as are contrary to that respect and confidence which are due to the word of God.

“ 21. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.
22. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.”

Zacharias is an emblem of the Jewish people, who gave not birth to Christ till in their old age, who were become speechless by their not having any longer prophets among them, and who spoke no more of the Messias to come, but only by the signs of sacrifices and other figures.—Let us here observe the charity of a good people towards their pastor, whose silence they look upon, not as a punishment, but as

an effect of a visit from God. Let us learn to put a favourable interpretation always, if we can, on that which happens to the clergy and to others.

“ 23. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.”

Ecclesiastical persons should not frequently appear in public, but only to discharge the functions of their ministry, and when that is done, should return to the privacy and retirement of their own houses. A man ought to be exact, faithful, and intent in the performance of his duty, whatever happens, after the example of Zacharias, whom neither haste to carry such joyful news to his wife, nor the loss of his speech, could draw from the exercise of his ministry: far, therefore, should a man be from seeking pretences to be excused from it.

“ 24. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,”

It belongs to God to make known the extraordinary favours which he bestows on men. As for them, they ought to conceal them, till either necessity or the glory of God obliges them to a discovery.

“ 25. Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.”

It is a favour to be exercised and tried; it is one also to be delivered: each has its proper time. There is a sort of honour in the world, which depends on the darkness or injustice of human judgments. Barrenness seems to be a punishment from God, and a disgrace to those who are ignorant of his ways, who value nothing but the present life and

the enjoyments of this world, and who understand neither the excellence of virginity, nor the advantages of spiritual fruitfulness. God some way or other still delivers those whom he loves: it is our duty to expect his time with confidence, and to leave the choice of our portion to him.

SECT. III.—*The Annunciation.*

“ 26. ¶ And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, 27. To a virgin espoused to a man, whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.”

At length the moment is come which is to give a Son to the Virgin, a Saviour to the world, a Pattern to mankind, a Sacrifice to sinners, a Head to the angels, a Temple to the Divinity, a new Worshipper to the eternal Father, a new nature to his Son, and a new principle to the new world. Is it not very just and reasonable that we should prepare ourselves for reading the history of the abasement of the Word, by a profound humiliation of heart, by adoration, gratitude, love, &c.? This angel is sent from God, not to the palaces of the great, nor to the kings or emperors of the earth, but to a poor maid, to the wife of a carpenter. Great degrees of grace are but seldom conferred on the great. The Son of God comes to humble these, and to honour poverty, weakness, and contempt. He chooses an obscure place for the mystery which is most glorious to his humanity; and for that which is most degrading, he will choose the greatest city. How far are men from such a conduct as this!

“ 28. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”

The state wherein the angel finds the Virgin, is retirement: this is that in which God is wont to diffuse his greatest favours. The Lord is in her by his grace, which fills and sanctifies her; he is with her by his power, which governs and protects her; and he is very mindful of her by his love, which chooses her, and raises her above other women by the honour of being the mother of Jesus. The angel knows the bottom and inclinations of her heart, and he praises that which he admires. What woman is there, who had not rather one might tell her that she is full of wit, and a person of great fortune and quality; that lords and princes are always with her, suing and making court to her; and that she is noble, handsome, and beautiful among women? The fulness of God’s grace, the fellowship with Jesus Christ, and the benediction and unction of the Holy Ghost; these are the things whereof one ought to be ambitious, and these are they which Mary values more than all the things of this world.

“ 29. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.”

This trouble is a trouble of grace, of light, of holiness, of prudence, of application, and of adherence to God. They who are truly humble, are always troubled when they hear themselves praised. Nothing is more reasonable or holy than such trouble, because they are then exposed to pride. A virgin ought always to be troubled when she is alone with

the other sex: too great a security is very dangerous. The person who guards a treasure, should watch continually; and watchfulness is never without some disquiet. Would to God that the fear alone of being wanting in their fidelity to him, would, after the blessed Virgin's example, trouble all those of her sex who expose themselves so easily to the violation of their promises or vows.

“ 30. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God. 31. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.”

Here are four marks of Mary's greatness:—1. Her election by pure grace and favour to be the mother of Jesus. 2. The incarnation of the Word in her. 3. His birth from her womb. 4. The right of giving him the name of Saviour.—What a gift is this, which God bestows on us in giving us his only Son! He is given to the Virgin as a Son by the Father, when she conceives him by the virtue of the Holy Ghost. She gives him to the world as a King, in giving him birth. He gives himself to mankind as a Saviour, when he takes that name upon him. Who will give us, O holy Virgin, the grace to receive him with dispositions approaching thine; thy humility, purity, fidelity, &c.?

“ 32. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

Here are four marks of the greatness of Jesus:—
1. The elevation of his human nature to the divine,

by its union with the Word. 2. His filiation according to the Divine nature. 3. His sovereignty over his church. 4. The eternity of his kingdom: the only one which has no end, while those of the earth pass away like a shadow.—How adorable is thy goodness, O Jesus, to make those partakers of thy greatness from whom thou receivest nothing but meanness in thy incarnation! The Christian in this life is made partaker of the divine nature in Christ, and enters into his filiation by the adoption of the Father: in the other, he will partake of his sovereignty and of the eternity of his kingdom. My God, what disengagement from earthly things does not the Christian grace require of us!

“ 34. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”

The first care of a virgin regards her virginity. One ought to be faithful in preserving that for God, which one has once consecrated to him. The holy Virgin is the apostle of virginity: by her, God makes it known to the world. Happy is that person who receives this gospel of purity. It is prudence, not to engage blindly in the most sacred works. An inviolable engagement to God by a vow of virginity, gives a right of examining the proposal of any other engagement which might be contrary thereto. Does it not seem, that the blessed Virgin’s love of virginity, and her fidelity towards God, were so great, that rather than be wanting therein, she was ready to refuse the dignity of being the mother of Jesus, if it had been inconsistent with them?

“ 35. And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the

power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God."

Every one of the three divine Persons has his part in the mystery of the incarnation. The Holy Ghost, as Spirit of grace, sanctification, and love, fills, prepares, and raises the body of the Virgin. The eternal Father communicates to her his fruitfulness and paternity, to render her his spouse, and mother of him of whom he is Father. The Son takes in and of her a new being and nature, which is sanctified by the Divinity itself. O my God, what a religion is that which is established upon such a foundation! What love in God, to bestow such a gift upon his creatures! What ingratitude in man, if he do not give himself entirely to his God, who gives him every thing; if he do not with his whole heart love God, who loves him so exceedingly!

" 36. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. 37. For with God nothing shall be impossible."

It is as easy to God to unite fruitfulness with virginity, as with barrenness and old age. God seldom fails to give signs of his great promises; but he would have men expect them from his goodness. These signs are new favours for those, who, like the blessed Virgin, in all things depend on him. They are beneficial chastisements for those who ask them out of diffidence, as Zacharias did. The almighty power of God, which is the first article of the creed, is the principal foundation of religion and faith; because it is his almighty will which is the principle

of all the operations of grace and mercy. It is on this account, that in the creed we make confession of grace no otherwise than in confessing the almighty power of God.

“ 38. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”

God does his creature the honour to ask her consent to the mighty work, which he purposed to effect in her; but he himself gives what he asks. The agreement of the almighty operation of God in the heart of man with the free consent of his will, is immediately showed us in the incarnation, as in the source and pattern of all the other operations of mercy and grace, all of them as free, and as much depending on God as this original operation. Let us be faithful in submitting ourselves to the designs of God concerning us, though beyond the reach of our comprehension, with faith, humility, obedience, renouncing our own understanding, and resigning ourselves to his commands, under the conduct, and with the advice of some visible angel, full of prudence, knowledge, and the power of God. Can we ever forget this adorable moment of the incarnation of the Word, the fountain of every grace, the sacred first-fruits of all the mysteries of Christ, and which gives us Jesus Christ himself!

SECT. IV.—*The Virgin visits Elisabeth.*

“ 39. ¶ And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill-country with haste, into a city of Juda;”

Jesus, being incarnate in Mary, and become her spirit, her heart, and principle of action, inclines her

to go seek John to sanctify him. How worthy to be imitated is this ardent zeal to propagate the Spirit of God in souls, and to consecrate them to him ! The mother of Jesus is the pattern of it, both for all the faithful, who conceive Jesus Christ in their hearts by faith, and chiefly for priests, who, bringing him forth in souls, have so particular a resemblance to the blessed Virgin. Mary is the first missionary of the evangelical law, who does that for her Son, and her Son by her, which his state and condition do not permit him to do by himself. Happy, and a thousand times happy they who imitate her, in crossing mountains, seas, and deserts, to convey Jesus Christ to those who know him not, and to seek souls in order to sanctify them by the communication and operation of the mystery of the Word incarnate.

“ 40. And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.”

The haughtiness of men is here condemned by the humility of the mother of Jesus, who first salutes Elisabeth. They who preach Jesus Christ to others, must have a preventing humility ; preventing, in respect both of those to whom they speak, and of those who are workers together with themselves, both whom John represents, as being the first-fruits both of believers and of preachers.

“ 41. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb ; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost : ”

Can those who are envious of Mary’s glory, here avoid seeing, that it is by her that the first communication of the Spirit of the incarnate Word is

made, and that Jesus begins to diffuse grace and joy into souls? How does sometimes even one word of a holy person fill those with light and grace who hear it! The invisible infant of Mary works on that of Elisabeth; but by the tongue of the former, and the ear of the latter. This is a representation of what Jesus Christ, who resides invisibly in his church and ministers, works in souls by the ministration of the word heard with faith.

“ 42. And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.”

The incarnation of the Word, and the maternity of the Virgin, are honoured and published first by Elisabeth. Who can forbear lifting up their voice in transports of joy, admiration, and gratitude, when they feel the sweet and powerful operation of grace in their heart? It is in and by the church, (that virgin blessed among women,) that grace works and makes itself perceptible. There is no fruit blessed but that of her womb, no blessing but in her bosom.

“ 43. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

And whence comes this happiness, that the Lord himself should come into us by the incarnation, by faith, and by grace!

“ 44. For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.”

God did all things by his word in the first creation; he does all things by it in the second: and it is by the word that Christ did every thing while on earth; and that the church works in his name

ever since he was in heaven. This is so, on purpose to honour his eternal and incarnate Word, and continually to renew the sense of that dependence which we have on him. How oft has the word of God sounded in our ears, and we, perhaps, have been so far from imitating John, as to be altogether insensible of it !

“ 45. And blessed is she that believed : for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

The amazing faith of a virgin so humble, is instrumental in preparing a remedy for the fatal consequences of Eve’s credulity. The latter, through pride and curiosity, believed the devil : the former, through humility and obedience, believes the angel Gabriel. Eve hoped that she should become like to God: Mary doubts not but that God would become like to man. Presumptuous Eve gave admittance to falsehood and death: humble and faithful Mary becomes the mother of truth and life. What is not faith able to do, which draws down on the blessed Virgin such extraordinary graces ? Faith is the source of true happiness ; as all real misery proceeds either from not believing at all, or from believing faintly. Souls less perfect, and of much inferior virtue, are, notwithstanding, sometimes serviceable to the most eminent ; and pastors are often assisted by the understanding of their flock ; as God here makes use of Elisabeth to confirm the Virgin in the belief of the incarnation, and in the hope of the promises.

SECT. V.—*The Song of the Virgin.*

“ 46. ¶ And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,”

An humble soul cannot hear its own praises long ; but takes occasion thence to lift itself up to God, and to glorify him for his gifts : and this application to God is a seasonable diversion to keep off vanity, which attributes all to itself, and to ascribe all to him to whom it is due. This address must proceed from the bottom of the heart, and not from the bare lips ; otherwise it is only a false humility and a double vanity.

“ 47. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”

Let Christians learn of the blessed Virgin to rejoice at God’s favours only in him and for him. How rare is this pure, this holy joy, wherewith a person rejoices at the gift, not on the account of the advantage received by it, but of the glory which redounds to God, being more intent on him than on his gift ! We must not receive his favours with sadness ; and it is ingratitude not to rejoice at his mercies.

“ 48. For he hath regarded the low estate of his hand-maiden : for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.”

Mary, in answer to that expression of Elisabeth, “ Blessed is she that believed,” which seemed to attribute to her some peculiar merit independent of grace, declares that all her merit consists in the regard which God was pleased to show to her low estate, and which is the source of all the great things he has wrought in her. Praise having alarmed the blessed

Virgin, she retires, and, as it were, entrenches herself within her own humility. This is a fort which is impregnable; as long as one continues in it one is safe. The more God exalts any person, the more ought he to humble himself: and the more he humbles himself, the more will God seek him with the eyes of his mercy. Let us judge of the blessed Virgin's greatness by her humility, and of her humility by her greatness: for the one increased always in proportion to the other.

" 49. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. 50. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation."

Here we ought, with the Virgin, to adore the power, holiness, and mercy of God in all his works, and above all, in the incarnation, wherein they appear most conspicuous. Power, in respect of the Father, whose virtue operates in the Virgin; mercy, in reference to the Son, who, in taking our nature, becomes a merciful High Priest; and holiness, with relation to the Holy Ghost, who becomes the Sanctifier of Jesus Christ in his new nature. Holiness is a perfection, whereby God retires, reposes, and, as one may say, secures himself within himself; which renders his name dreadful to his creatures, and is that inaccessible light in which he dwells. Mercy is a perfection which diffuses itself abroad, whereby God stoops to his creatures, and which renders him accessible even to the greatest sinners. These two perfections, so contrary in this respect, are reconciled and closely united together, when God unites himself to man in the mystery of the God-man.

“ 51. He hath showed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.”

All the instances of God’s power, which appeared in the deliverance of his people, in the victories over their enemies, in their establishment, and in all the wonders which preceded it in the wilderness, were only a shadow, and a preparation to the work of his arm, which is the incarnation, and to all the consequences of it, in the forming of his church, and the salvation of the elect. God, by humbling the proud, has always made it evident, that pride is more displeasing to him than all other vices, that it is the great wound of man’s heart, and that it was in order to heal it, and to teach it humility, that the Son of God abased himself.

“ 52. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. 53. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.”

All the instances of God’s mercy, which appeared in the exaltation of those of low degree, and in the liberal distribution of his blessings under the old law, were no more than a small specimen, a slight draught of the riches of his great mercy reserved for his church, and of the gift of his Son and his Holy Spirit, which was to raise fallen man, to supply all his wants, and completely satisfy all his wishes and desires. The blessed Virgin, being more hungry after these good things, and more ardently desirous of them, had also the happiness to be the more filled with them. Let us take great care, lest the love of earthly things, which is always accompanied with a

disgust towards heavenly, should render us unworthy of these, as it did the priests, the Pharisees, and the other rejected Jews.

“ 54. He hath holpen* his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;” [* *Fr.* United to himself.]

All the instances of holiness and love, which appeared in God’s covenant with his people, in the establishment of the law, of sacrifices, and of the whole legal sanctity, are nothing in comparison of that holiness and love, which are found in the ineffable union of Christ with his church the true Israel, of the Son with his holy mother, and of the Head with its members, by means of the still more holy and close union of the Word with the human nature, which is the effect of the pure mercy of God, and is indeed his greatest mercy.

“ 55. As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”

In short, the incarnation is the accomplishment of the promises, the miraculous birth of the true Isaac, the true Son of Abraham, and Him for whom all the promises are reserved; the source of all true blessings, the bud which encloses all the elect, their grace, their sanctification, and eternal salvation. How many wonders, how many instructions are contained in this song, under a prophetic language, which expresses at the same time the past, the present, and the future! When we love, in imitation of the blessed Virgin and her cousin, to feed on the divine Scriptures by reading joined with prayer, we then understand this language perfectly well, and profit thereby.

“ 56. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.”

Charity is persevering, and never forsakes any one in time of need. The blessed Virgin’s mission lasts three months ; and during all that time, Christ, by her ministry, works on the heart of his forerunner, in order to form himself in him. This is an instruction for missionaries and pastors of souls, who ought to give their people all the time which is necessary to change the heart, to destroy the habits of sin, to inform themselves of their duty, to know themselves thoroughly, to frame themselves to piety, and to lay the firm foundations of it in retirement and prayer. When a person has finished the work which God has given him to do, he must return to his own house, and resume his ordinary exercises and employments.

SECT. VI.—*The Birth of John Baptist.*

“ 57. ¶ Now Elisabeth’s full time came that she should be delivered ; and she brought forth a son. 58. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had showed great mercy upon her ; and they rejoiced with her.”

Charity bears no envy towards our neighbour, but rejoices at the good which happens to him. All good is performed and possessed in common in the church ; and all its members being obliged to labour for the body, and in the spirit of the body, the joy thereof ought also to be common.

“ 59. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child ; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.”

The righteous are far from endeavouring to ex-

empt themselves from general and ordinary laws, under pretence of extraordinary graces. John, though sanctified from his mother's womb, notwithstanding receives the sacrament of circumcision. Grace, which precedes the effect of sacraments in the heart by a secret way, far from obstructing the use of common and public means, inclines and obliges thereto. John, as well as Abraham, " received the sign of circumcision, as a seal of the righteousness which he had yet being uncircumcised ; because he was to be the first preacher of a righteousness and holiness which was independent on circumcision. Holiness and humility are characters which are inseparable.

" 60. And his mother answered and said, Not so ; but he shall be called John. 61. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. 62. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. 63. And he asked for a writing-table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all."

The birth of John, rendered famous by many miracles, disposes men to believe the all-miraculous birth of the incarnate Word. Every thing is to be prophetic in John, every thing is to denote his mission. His name, which signifies the gift, the grace, and mercy of God, shows, that he is to point out, as it were, with his finger, Him who is the gift of God, the Author of grace, and the Victim of mercy. A preacher ought to make the truths he delivers apparent and manifest in his person, and to be entirely a man of grace. Every thing in him should preach. A name so short and so holy as that of John, an express messenger from heaven, does it not condemn

that affectation of a train of great names and long titles, which are frequently used for state in the most apostolical employment, and in a ministry of humility and servitude?

“ 64. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.”

John made the first essay on his father of that which he was to do in the world, which was to open the ears and mouth of people, that they might hear and bless God. Happy the penitent who, after the example of Zacharias, breaks silence, only to praise Him who has showed mercy on him! It is highly just and reasonable to employ the gifts of God to his glory, and to consecrate to him both the first-fruits of them and the lump.

“ 65. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill-country of Judea. 66. And all they that had heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.”

All these wonders are going in a little time to be buried in the wilderness. The more holy this child is, and the more he is designed for great things, the more will God hide him from the world. By this birth, so eminent and illustrious, God would render the Jews intent on the time of that of the Messias, and induce them carefully to study the prophecies, that they might bear witness thereto.

“ 67. ¶ And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,”

After that Zacharias has been purified by repen-

tance, and his tongue sanctified by a silence of nine months, God fills him with his Spirit, and gives him the tongue of a prophet. One speaks quite otherwise of God, when one has been a long time without either speaking to men, or hearing them speak.

SECT. VII.—*The Song of Zacharias.*

“ 68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,”

This song begins with thanksgiving for the two great benefits of the incarnation and redemption. This prophet counts the salvation of mankind as good as accomplished, as soon as our Saviour is born, and that by his birth the designs of God begin to be put in execution. God visits us as a Father by the person of his Son and word—the Word, as a sacrifice, redeems us by his blood. O my God, what a visit dost thou make to man ! Thou enterest into a house of clay, into a mortal body, to make it thy victim, and to redeem thy people by thy sacrifice : and yet scarce any one reflects upon it.

“ 69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ;”

Jesus Christ saves us by his power, as King, and as the true David. David’s victories, and the establishment of his kingdom, are but the figure and shadow of the victories of Christ, and of the establishment of his church. He chose to be descended of the royal house, that he might be the better received by the Jews, and that he might fulfil the promises : but he would have this house be first decayed, that he might not partake at all of the lustre and greatness of it. The power of our blessed Saviour is not

that of an earthly king: since it all consists in humiliation, abasement, poverty, weakness, &c.

“ 70. As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began;”

All the saints are so many witnesses of God’s faithfulness in his promises.

“ 71. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;”

The devil, death, and sin, are the enemies which Christ came to conquer. Sin is the most dangerous of all, and properly the only enemy we have to fear. The devil is without us; death is only in our flesh; sin is in our will: and to destroy this last there, an almighty Saviour is necessary. Lord, be thou the Saviour and Deliverer of my will, and exert upon it the omnipotence of thy saving hand !

“ 72. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant,”

The old covenant is the figure of the union or alliance of the Word with our nature in the incarnation, and of the church with God by and in Jesus Christ. An alliance all of mercy, both in the promise and in the performance, and that in respect both of the patriarchs and of Christians. The virtue of Christ’s mysteries extends even back to all past ages; and it is in the incarnation that Abraham and the other fathers receive the mercy and the covenant promised to them, and eternal salvation.

“ 73. The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,”

How great is the goodness of God, to oblige himself to his creatures by oath ! But how great the infidelity of his creatures, who do not believe even

the oath of God ! Abraham believed the incarnation of the Word, and all the promises comprehended in Jesus Christ, though he was not to receive the effect of them till almost two thousand years after his death. What confusion should this cast on those incredulous persons who do not believe them, after they have been fulfilled, and confirmed by the miracles and by the faith of so many ages ; and are, as it were, continually exposed to their sight !

“ 74. That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.”

The effect of the incarnation is, to make us serve God, no longer by a slavish fear, but with a filial love ; by a religion, no longer ceremonial and figurative, but substantial and internal ; in a holiness and righteousness, no longer legal, carnal, and transient, but Christian, spiritual, and eternal. The unchangeable promises of God are accomplished only in the body of the elect, whereof Christ is the head. The call to conversion, or the first justification, which delivers them from sin, and takes them out of the devil’s power—a Christian life, shown by works of true righteousness—and final perseverance—are the three principal effects of divine predestination and the oath of God ; and the infallible way to glory, which is the fourth and last effect, and full completion of the promise.

“ 76. And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest : for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways ; 77. To give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins,”

Nothing is greater than “to go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways” in souls; since this is that which makes all the greatness of John. His function, and that of all spiritual directors, is to teach men Jesus Christ, and to prepare them to receive from him “the knowledge of salvation, and the remission of their sins.” There is a necessary connection betwixt the true knowledge of salvation, and reconciliation with God: for, by filling themselves with bad principles and maxims remote from the gospel, men too often set themselves at a farther distance from God, and lull themselves asleep in a superficial piety. Teach us, Lord, this true knowledge of salvation, which will infallibly guide us to thee!

“ 78. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us,”

The incarnation, and the whole train of our blessed Saviour’s mysteries, the first light which shines on our heart, and the whole series of graces which work salvation, are the effects of the love and tender mercy of God. The incarnation is the rising of the Sun of righteousness, which is come to change the darkness of sin into the light of faith. Such, in respect of a sinner, is the first ray which strikes the eyes of his mind, in order to make him a child of light. These are two benefits, the one general, the other particular, both worthy of an eternal acknowledgment.

“ 79. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

The designs of God in the incarnation of his Son, are, 1. To dispel the darkness of ignorance, sin, and death. 2. To turn our hearts, and all their in-

clinations, toward heaven. **3.** To give us the true peace of eternity.—There was nothing but darkness on earth, when the Son of God came down upon it; there is nothing but darkness in the heart of man, before that his grace begins to shine therein. It is by faith that he enlightens us; it is by this that he conducts his elect to his glory; it is this which is the sole way of evangelical peace in this life, and of beatific peace in the other, to which all the designs of God concerning his elect tend, and in which do terminate all the mysteries of Christ, and his whole conduct towards his church.

“ **80.** And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.”

The duties of an evangelical preacher, before he begins his ministry, are, **1.** To grow in piety, by feeding on the bread of prayer. **2.** To give his zeal time to wax strong, by reading the Holy Scriptures. **3.** To continue in silence and retirement, until God is pleased to bring him forth and show him to the world. How many graces, how many lights, were for thirty years concealed in the deserts, while the darkness of ignorance and vice increased on the earth! Men deceive themselves, when they imagine that they ought to produce and employ their talents without delay, and that they cannot hide them without violating the command of God. On the contrary, they violate it in not waiting his proper time, but making the wants of their neighbour alone a sufficient call.

CHAPTER II.

SECT. I.—*The Birth of the Son of God Incarnate.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)”

The greatest princes often form magnificent designs, and undertake great enterprises, without knowing the reason of them. Augustus imagines, that he is busied in advancing the glory of his name, and the lustre of his reign, and at the same time his orders, by means of others more powerful and absolute than his, become subservient to the accomplishment of prophecies, of which he is altogether ignorant; to the birth of a king, whom he will never know; and to the establishment of a monarchy, which will subject his and all others to itself. This is what happens in all ages, and men take no notice of it.

“ 3. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) 5. To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.”

There is nothing here but what seems to happen by chance; and yet every thing is ordered by Providence, to ascertain and fix, by a public testimony, the knowledge of the time and place of the Messiah’s birth, and of his extraction from the house of David.

The Son of God, by being enrolled from his very birth as true man, gives security, as one may say, for his obedience, humility, and the performance of the promises. It is hereby very visible, that his greatness, foretold by the angel, is not a human greatness. The poverty, trouble, and subjection, to which Joseph and Mary are exposed, are the preparation for the gift which they are going to receive from God. Let us learn to submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, and chiefly to the royal power, since we see Jesus Christ beginning to obey, from, and even before his birth.

“ 6. ¶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.”

Christ, having submitted himself to the laws of nature, and to an imprisonment of nine months, hides the glory of his birth, by being born in an obscure place; he teaches us to wean ourselves from our own country, and from this whole present world, by being born in a journey; he recommends poverty, mortification, and humility to us, by being born in a place borrowed from the brute beasts, and destitute of all conveniences and of all assistance. How many instructions are here for us, from this very first moment, if we can thoroughly understand them! Let us hear them in the spirit of adoration and lowliness.

“ 7. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Jesus Christ is the first-born of the blessed Virgin; we are in some sense her younger children. His

stooping to the weakness of infancy, is so much the more worthy to be adored, as it appears more unworthy of his greatness and wisdom. Rejected of men, he borrows the habitation of beasts. Let human pride blush as long as it will, to have a God become an infant of a day, of a moment, reduced to the confinement of swaddling-clothes, to the meanness of a manger, to the mansion of beasts, to have recourse to the assistance of his creatures, and to be refused by them. It is the Christian's glory, that his God would do and suffer all this for his salvation : it is his honour to adore him, to own him for his King, and to pay him homage in all his states and conditions.

SECT. II.—*The Shepherds.*

“ 8. ¶ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them ; and they were sore afraid.”

Christ manifests himself to the simple and the poor, rather than to the learned and the rich. It is for vigilant pastors that the light of God is reserved, that they may know the mysteries of religion and their own duties ; the negligent are left in their darkness. From this moment, Lord, thou beginnest to show who they are whom thou choosest for thy kingdom, and whom thou dost reject.

“ 10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”

The birth of Christ is the joy of this world, and

the world knows it not. The world has its vain and its criminal joys, and thereby becomes unworthy to have any part in the joy of our blessed Saviour's birth. This is a representation of that which happens every day: men have their hearts shut to heavenly things, in proportion as they keep them open to earthly pleasures and desires.

“ 11. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

This verse contains an abridgment of all that is great in the character of Jesus, which was propounded to the faith of the shepherds, and which God made known inwardly to them, under the external sign of that light which shone round about them. As Son of David, and heir of the promises, he has a royal birth; as Saviour, a sovereign goodness; as Christ, the fulness of God's Spirit, and of the sacerdotal and prophetic unction; and as the Lord, a divine power. What ought we not to hope from a Saviour, in whom is found a sovereign power joined to an infinite goodness, which reduced him to the meanest condition for our sakes?

“ 12. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger.”

Is this then, O Lord, the sign of thy greatness, the ornament of thy royalty, and the throne of thy glory? O manger, of more value than all the most rich and precious things in the world, may I learn at thy foot, that it is by humility that Christ comes to reign, and that this is the only way which leads to his kingdom! Pride is the character of the children of Adam; humility, the mark of the Son of God, and of the elect.

“ 13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,”

God, by causing the spirits of heaven to honour his Son in the humble capacity of an infant, teaches those on earth, for whose sake he comes into the world, what homage they owe him in that state. Angels think themselves happy, by their praises to advance the glory of a new-born infant, and to adore him as their God: and shall men disdain to do it? The manger of our blessed Saviour, as well as his cross, is to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles foolishness; his infancy, as well as his death, is the rock against which human pride is wont to split: but these things are the power and wisdom of God, for the salvation of those who believe, and are the object even of the adoration of the angels.

“ 14. Glory to God in the highest, and * on earth peace, good-will toward men.” [* *Fr.* Peace on earth to the men whom he loves.]

The two principal motives of the incarnation, are “ the glory of God,” and the reconciliation of men. God promises “ peace on earth” to those whom he loves, but not rest. The peace of God consists in his love, to what trouble and storms soever this love may expose a Christian. The peace which reigns on earth at this time, is only to signify the birth of the God of peace.

“ 15. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.”

When God puts it in any person's mind to seek Jesus Christ, to perform some duty towards him, or to apply himself to any of his mysteries, he ought to neglect nothing. The angel does not order the shepherds to go to Bethlehem : but to faithful souls, it is enough only to propose, and make known the good, in order to engage them to undertake it. It is sufficient to a good Christian, and to a pious lady, barely to say, 'Christ is in this poor tabernacle, as in a manger, forsaken of all the world ; he is in this poor wretch, almost naked, lodged in a miserable cottage, and destitute of every thing.' This company of shepherds, who excite one another to go to Bethlehem, is an emblem of the religious societies of those zealous persons, who, profiting by the exhortations and the light of their visible angels, mutually encourage one another to visit poor families, prisons, and fatherless infants, in honour of Jesus, once a poor infant, "wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger." Let us go even unto Bethlehem, the house of the bread of heaven. Would to God, that those who are out of this house, that is, out of the church, would encourage one another to come thither and seek Jesus Christ, that they might there taste with us what "the Lord hath made known unto us."

" 16. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."

Will not sinners blush at their niceness and profuseness as to their beds, beholding the Son of God in a manger ? Whenever a good work presents itself to be done, far from losing any time, we ought immediately to follow the motions of grace, for fear

they should cease, and lest some other person should rob us, either of the opportunity, or of the first-fruits of a pious work. This inversion of order, the wife named before the husband, and the creatures before the Creator, plainly denotes the inversion made by the incarnation.

“ 17. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.”

These shepherds give credit to the angel’s word, without arguing; they see the meanness and poorness of the manger, without being offended; and they reflect upon the whole, without being in the least troubled: this is the advantage of an humble, simple, and submissive faith. How many false reasonings would philosophers have advanced on this occasion! With how many manifest contradictions would the great wits of the world have been perplexed!

“ 18. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.”

The shepherds, the first apostles of the child Jesus, are faithful in publishing the news of his birth. God gives a blessing to the simplicity of their relation, causing it to meet with credit every where. God does not love, nor give a blessing to that human prudence, which thinks that the seeming meanness of the mysteries of religion should be concealed. It belongs to man to obey without suppressing any thing, and to God to cause belief by inspiring faith.

“ 19. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”

Mary being consecrated, and having her mind raised to Christ, filled with his mysteries, and altogether intent on gathering the virtue, spirit, and grace of them, condemns the forgetfulness and negligence wherein Christians live, in respect of those things which their blessed Saviour has done for them. In order to profit by the mysteries and truths of the gospel, it is not enough, barely to keep them in memory; we must, in the presence of our Lord, entertain ourselves with them, and frequently meditate upon them, after the holy Virgin's example. To her we owe the first pattern of Christian meditation upon the life of Christ: let us follow so holy an example.

" 20. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."

The shepherds imitate her, in adoring and glorifying God. This is the first effect of faith, the first duty of religion, and a tribute of acknowledgment due to the gift of God. The praise of these good people is as simple as their faith; and this is what God loves. And as "they returned glorifying and praising God :" so true Christians ought, in the same manner, to return home from the church, whither they come to worship Christ, and to hear his mysteries, virtues, and precepts delivered and explained.

SECT. III.—*The Circumcision and Purification.*

" 21. ¶ And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

Let us adore and imitate the exact obedience of Jesus to the particular law of circumcision, by which he engages himself to observe the whole Jewish law, as well according to the letter, as to the spirit. Give me, Lord, the grace, which thou hast hereby merited for me, to circumcise the pride and impurity of my heart, and whatever remains in me of Adam's corruption. Christ, though innocent, takes upon him the mark, the shame, and the remedy of sin; and yet the sinner himself cannot bear them! The other instances of our blessed Saviour's humiliation, come attended, as it were, with the credentials of some miracle; none appears in this. The law, which subjected only sinners to it, authorizes and confirms it; and nothing dignifies and sets it off but the adorable name of JESUS or SAVIOUR. By this first effusion of his blood, he exercises the office of a Saviour, at the same time that he takes the name. How adorable are these first-fruits of his pains! Let this holy name be ever my refuge and confidence, my strength and support, my peace and consolation; and let it be truly to me a name of salvation! Exert upon my heart, O Jesus, the right and sovereign power which it gives thee to save me!

“ 22. And when the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; 23. (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)”

Jesus submits to the law, to redeem those who were oppressed with it. His public oblation in the temple, is the sign, and, as it were, the sacrament of

his internal and perpetual oblation, begun at the moment of his incarnation in his Father's sight, upon the altar of his own heart. Would to God that parents would present their children to the Lord, with a piety, intention, and religion, pure and disengaged from the earth, in imitation of the blessed Virgin. She willingly partakes with her Son in the humiliation of a ceremony, which, as to him, seemed to dishonour his divinity and the holiness of his birth; and as to her, her divine maternity and the purity of her bringing forth. These reasons would have been sufficient to have induced others to excuse themselves from it.

“24. And to offer a sacrifice, according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons.”

Jesus is redeemed, not that he may dispense with his being consecrated to God, and serving in his temple, but that he may accomplish a more perfect consecration, and be himself the priest and the victim of God, the temple and the altar of his sacrifice on the cross. All Christians, once redeemed by Jesus Christ, are under the happy necessity of being unable to purchase a dispensation from their consecration. This was effected by their baptism, wherein their hearts were anointed and consecrated by the Holy Ghost. Wo to them, if they live not up to the holiness of their consecration, by imitating Christ their Head, in whom they are both priests and victims, to offer and consecrate their own hearts to God by his Spirit. Is it not a misfortune, for the eldest sons of the nobility to be, as it were, dedicated to the world by their birth, and scarce to have any liberty

at all of redeeming and consecrating themselves to God? O Jesus, Redeemer of the world, and redeemed with so vile a price to be the victim of it, grant that I may redeem myself from its slavery, and belong entirely to God by thy grace!

SECT. IV.—*The Song of Simeon. Anna, the Prophetess.*

“ 25. ¶ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.”

Simeon affords us an idea of a truly good man, full of religion and love to God, of an exact justice and sincere charity towards his neighbour, who lives on earth expecting only the life of heaven, and follows in all things the light and motions of the Spirit of God. All the difference betwixt a good Jew and a good Christian consists in this: the one waited for the first coming of Christ in the weakness of mortal flesh, the other waits for his second coming in the majesty of immortal glory. Jesus Christ is, both in the one and the other, truly “ the consolation of Israel,” of the true Israelite who is not of this world.

“ 26. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”

How good is it to live in the fear of God, in the expectation of his Son, and under the guidance of his Spirit, since one receives from hence so much comfort even in this world! The elect of God never die without “ seeing the Lord’s Christ” here below. For from whence arises their fidelity, but only from

their seeing, with invisible eyes, Him who is invisible? One could not possess him by hope, if one did not see him by faith.

“ 27. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,”

How many Christians go to church, out of curiosity, custom, human respects, or interest! How few go thither by the impulse of the Holy Spirit! Happy the Christian, who is sure of always finding Christ in the churches, and of receiving him there by the communion! But in order to find him there to our advantage, we must carry him thither in our hearts, and perform with respect to him whatever is enjoined by his law. He is found as truly in the hands of wicked priests, as in those of Mary and Joseph. Would to God we might never find him in his temple, except only to adore and serve him as Simeon did!

“ 28. Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,”

Simeon, in taking Christ up in his arms, received a singular favour, but such as would have been of no advantage to him had he not borne him also in his heart. He is in this heart, he lives and operates in it, he renews it, and by the impression of his holy infancy he makes it the heart of a little child, he baptizes and confirms it, gives it the communion, feeds it invisibly, and anoints it with the unction of his Spirit, that so this holy person may finish his course and his sacrifice with a joy altogether heavenly, while he is pouring forth his heart in the praises and benedictions of his Saviour.

“ 29. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,”

This song of Simeon is a pattern of thanksgiving after the communion. He who has Jesus Christ really living in his heart, longs after nothing but the life of the world to come, and endures this with patience. How could this holy old man have departed in peace, and been so soon separated from his Jesus so long desired, had not Jesus himself, by forming and imprinting himself in his heart at that very moment, taught him from thenceforward not to know Jesus Christ according to the flesh? There is a way of seeing and possessing Christ, independent of the senses, which is not well known but by the saints, and has more consolation in it than that which is sensible. Happy Simeon, thus, as it were, to carry Christ with him into the place where the patriarchs resided, and to be the first messenger to publish the birth of a Saviour to the church of the elect, who lived only on this hope.

“ 31. Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;”

Jesus Christ is offered to all, but received by few. No sooner is he born, but he causes it to be published to all nations, that he is their Saviour; and this he does by the mouth of a Jew, which condemns beforehand the jealousy of his own people.

“ 32. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”

Here is mercy towards the Gentiles, who never knew God; here is mercy towards the people of Israel, who abused this knowledge: but, O God,

what difference, since the latter receive the light only to reject it ! The very order of the words shows the preference of the former before the latter. Christ is the glory of his people, by being descended from them, by preaching salvation to them preferably to all other people, and not calling others, but only upon their refusal : but then, through this refusal, he becomes their shame, their condemnation, and their ruin. Thus it is also in respect of such Christians as reject Jesus Christ by their works. Thou art our light, O Jesus ! but we must have eyes to see, a heart to love, and feet to follow thee ; and thou alone canst bestow them on us.

“33. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.”

Christ will not by himself teach those every thing whom he loves most. He frequently puts souls, even of the first rank, under the instruction of others, whose knowledge and holiness are much inferior. The truths which the saints already know, are always new to them ; and they therein every day find some fresh occasion to adore God. A faith which is intent, discovers still, from time to time, in the works of God, and more especially in Christ Jesus, some new footsteps of his greatness, love, and holiness, still something for which to admire eternally the dispensations and inexhaustible riches of his Spirit.

“34. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; and for a sign which shall be spoken against ;”

Miserable is that person, who, not leading a life

conformable to Christ, whom he professed in his baptism, finds in him nothing but his own destruction. Jesus is the salvation of many; but, O adorable conduct! he must for this very end be exposed to the contradiction of sinners. Who will complain of being spoken against in the service of God, since he sees even the Son of God exposed to contradiction? And who has not sufficient cause of humiliation, in being himself instrumental in forming by his life this contradiction to Jesus Christ? Dreadful distinction! but I hope, Lord, that thou wilt be my resurrection and life, because thou hast vouchsafed me the grace to hope only in thee, and to accept, without contradiction, the maxims and ways of thy gospel.

“35. (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

God generallymingles some bitterness with the greatest joys of the saints. The blessed Virgin received the impression of all her Son’s sufferings. Thus God treats those whom he loves most. The gospel is the touch-stone, which discovers those who belong truly to God. The evangelical sword, which Christ came to bring, soon separates those who love the peace of the world, from those who love only that of a good conscience. There is nothing more secret and concealed than self-love; but works betray it. Those who love God, part with all for his sake: but when a man prefers some sensual good before him, he makes it evidently appear that he loves that sensual good better than God.

“36. ¶ And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was

of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37. And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38. And she, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in * Jerusalem." [Fr. The redemption of Israel.]

Anna is a pattern of the continence and life of a true Christian widow. Her portion is constancy in the exercises of religion, mortification, prayer, and the offices of charity. The Holy Ghost does not vouchsafe so much as to speak here of the great persons of the earth; but he writes the life and eulogy of a poor widow, to preserve her memory to the end of the world, and to show how grateful to him this kind of life is. Happy that widow who "looks for the redemption of Israel," and lives on the hope of finding, at the end of her days, the expected Saviour in the true temple, in the heavenly Jerusalem, in the blessed eternity! Here is an emblem of it: God gathers round the body of his Sacrifice all these eagles, who hungered very much after it, and lived only on the expectation of being filled therewith. Let us desire it, and we shall find it.

" 39. ¶ And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth."

Christ, being manifested to a small number of his elect, retires and hides himself for thirty years, leading an obscure life, in a place out of which it was not believed that any good thing could come. He

chooses his own country, and the place of his acquaintance, for the scene of an humble, poor, and laborious life, waiting for his Father's command to manifest himself to the world, to exercise his office of Saviour by his miracles, to establish his kingdom by his preaching, and to accomplish his sacrifice by his death.

“ 40. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom ; and the grace of God was upon him.”

Christ chose to grow in his natural body, to teach us that he intends to grow in the members of his mystical body, with an increase of grace and holiness to a perfect age. All the treasures of the divine wisdom and knowledge were in Christ, from the very moment of his incarnation ; but they are unfolded and produced abroad only by measure and by degrees, according to the orders and designs of his Father.

SECT. V.—*The child Jesus in the midst of the Doctors.*

“ 41. ¶ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.”

It is here expressly said, that they went thither every year, but it is not said that they went oftener : to induce us, on the one hand, to be faithful in the discharge of those duties to which we are obliged ; and, on the other, not to run, either through restless zeal or idleness, after all manner of popular devotions. Retirement, and application to our domestic duties, being more profitable, and more pleasing to God. Christ is brought thither regularly by his parents from his infancy, on purpose to teach parents

to carry their children to church, and to watch over them as to religious duties.

“ 42. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast.”

Jesus celebrated yearly by anticipation the solemnity of the true passover, taking occasion by the law to go and offer himself as in sacrifice to his Father, and to prepare himself to fulfil all these types and figures by his death and resurrection. Every Sunday is the solemnity of the passover of Christians, which they ought to celebrate in their parish-churches, their Jerusalem.

“ 43. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem ; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.”

Christ sometimes hides himself from the most pious souls, to exercise their faith, and to increase their love and desires towards him. If our Lord, in the time of his greatest subjection, had not done some actions of independence, the belief of his divinity would perhaps have been less lively on that account. He quits not one dependence, but only by reason of another, more holy and indispensable, in respect of his Father. We must imitate him by never withdrawing ourselves from dependence, without the command of God.

“ 44. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day’s journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.”

Let us be faithful in seeking Christ, with an ardent and indefatigable care, in the day of this life, and by the light of faith. He is very rarely to be found among the kindred and friends of the world.

God permits men sometimes to seek him, with a good intention, but not sufficiently enlightened, where they ought not, to the end they may be the more persuaded that they cannot seek him successfully, but by his own light and grace.

“ 45. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.”

We must not be discouraged when, even in all appearance, Christ seems unwilling to be found by us; but we must persevere in our search. It is in the church alone that we ought to seek him; it is there we may infallibly find him. Whoever seeks him elsewhere, wearis himself in vain: he will by no means find him out of Jerusalem, out of the only temple of God.

“ 46. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.”

This absence of Christ for three days, was a figure of those three days in which his disciples bewailed his death, and believed him lost. His manifestation in the temple, is an emblem of the lustre of his resurrection. It is in the house of prayer that a man finds Christ, after having lost him. The humility of Jesus, in hearing those whose master he was, was the finest spectacle, the most useful lesson, the most edifying example, and the most holy sacrifice, which had been ever seen in the temple to that time.

“ 47. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.”

This manifestation of the divine wisdom in child-

hood, served to awaken the faith of those who expected the promised consolation. Those who knew not the Son of God, had reason to admire his wisdom ; but we who know him, should rather admire that he so long suppressed, and, as it were, annihilated it for our sake ; and should learn for his, to restrain our own forwardness to show ourselves on all occasions.

“ 48. And when they saw him, they were amazed : and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us ? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.”

The holy rigour with which Christ treats those whom he loves, leaving them often under trouble and affliction, is a mystery which self-love understands not. There is no grief equal to that of a soul which loves God, and thinks it has lost him. It must cost abundance of tears to find Christ again, being once lost. Joseph is called, even by the blessed Virgin, the father of Jesus ; not as being such like others, but because he was so by representation, by alliance, being his mother’s husband, head of his family, foster-father of his flesh, tutor of his childhood, guardian of his life, &c.

“ 49. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me ? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business ?”

The first known words of Jesus Christ, priest, victim, and teacher, spoken in the temple, and in the midst of the doctors, are words of consecration, sacrifice, self-denial, zeal, and light. Let them teach us to do the work of God, without consulting with flesh and blood. This is a lesson of self-denial, as

well for the parents of the ministers of God, as for the ministers themselves. To busy these in secular employments and temporal affairs, is to forget that it is only for those of heaven that they are ecclesiastics.

“ 50. And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.”

A man ought to be reserved in speaking to his parents concerning that which belongs to the ecclesiastical ministry, after the example of our blessed Lord in respect of the holiest of parents. It is modesty and humility in parents not to be too curious to know it, in imitation of the holy Virgin and Joseph. They knew not but that the time of his ministry and manifestation was already come: but they wait, with a respectful silence, for what he shall be pleased to discover of it to them.

“ 51. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. 52. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

We know nothing of what Jesus did for eighteen or twenty years, but only that he was subject to his parents, and that he increased in wisdom and favour, as well as in age. We know nothing likewise of the blessed Virgin, but only that she kept in her heart the words of her Son, even those which she did not understand. Let us remember to do the same things after their example. Jesus returns to his ordinary dependence, as soon as his Father’s orders permit him to do it. What an example is here for children; but, alas! unknown to the generality of them, through the fault of parents themselves.

Did these but take care frequently to place Jesus Christ before their eyes, and make them study the example of his virtues, they themselves would first reap the fruit of it.

CHAPTER III.

SECT. I.—*The Preaching of St. John the Baptist.*

“ 1. Now, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,”

The divine Author of the Scriptures neglects not the human advantages of a most exact chronological era of the foundation of Christ’s kingdom. The history of his life is a mystery of faith, and a work altogether divine, concealed under human appearances. As the eternal Word, though incarnate by the operation of the Holy Ghost, seemed to be born in our flesh like other men, because he was to appear among the Jews for thirty years as a mere man, and until he had been acknowledged to be the Son of God: so the written word of God, though inspired by the Holy Ghost, seems to have been composed after a manner altogether human; because, being first designed for the Jews, who would never receive it as divine Scripture, it was to have all the appearance and characters of a human history of such things as had passed before their eyes, and which was sufficient to make them discover the Messias in the life and miracles of Christ, by comparing them with the

ancient prophecies. When the Christian church was once formed by preaching and miracles, the divine authority of the Gospels was then made manifest to Christians, the church being in a condition to settle her canon of Scripture, and to attest the authenticity thereof.

“ 2. Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.”

It is a rule, not to forsake retirement in order to instruct others, except at the call of God; not to anticipate it; not to put it off. Happy is that person, who has perfectly learned in retirement to be satisfied with God, and to live without the world, to the end that he may not know it but only in reference to God, and may have respect to him alone when he delivers his truths to it. How great is the difference, betwixt a preacher formed gradually by the hand of God in retirement, fasting, and prayer, and those ordained in haste, who have no other school but the world, no other masters besides themselves, and no other preparation than human studies, interrupted by worldly conversations, diversions, play, good cheer, &c.

“ 3. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;”

Men ought to preach repentance, more than any other thing whatever, it being the foundation of Christian piety. This is what the world does not at all love: but its wants, not its taste, must be consulted. We see abundance of persons do all they can to make themselves sick, and nothing in order

to be cured. This is a folly, which the love of life and health renders very rare in relation to the body; but nothing is more common in respect of the soul.

“ 4. As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

Repentance is preached in the wilderness, because it is seldom hearkened to in the world, and because it is necessary for a man to leave it, at least for a time, or in spirit, and by a separation of heart, if he would perform a substantial repentance. This is the only way to return to God, and to prevail with him to return to us. It is into the heart that he is to come; it is the heart chiefly which we must “ prepare and make straight.” And how can this be done but by the love of God, which alone can rectify that which the love of the world has made crooked and corrupt?

“ 5. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; 6. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

The internal preparation which Christ requires of us, to the end that we may beg it of him, consists in the humiliation of the heart, the meekness of charity, the rectitude of the intention, the uniformity of the life, the renouncing of our own wisdom and righteousness, and in an ardent desire and humble hope of his grace and Holy Spirit. To this must be joined the external works of repentance, in order to mortify the flesh, to humble the spirit, and to cut off all ex-

cess and superfluity in the conduct of our lives. It is in true penitents, that the power of a Saviour, and the truth of salvation, are most evidently seen. Give me, Lord, this true repentance, which restores thee to sinners, and causes them to find in thee an almighty and divine Saviour.

SECT. II.—*John's Advice to the People, the Publicans, and the Soldiers.*

“ 7. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

An apostolical freedom is a thing which a preacher ought always to preserve, that he may not flatter sinners. It is his indispensable duty, in a prudent manner, to make them thoroughly sensible what they really are before God as sinners, let their rank and quality be ever so great before men. Those who have either sucked in heresy with their milk, or been corrupted by the ill example of their parents, or by a bad education, cannot enough admire how they have been able to quit a state of sin, and “ to flee from the wrath” and judgment of God: this is a particular favour, which requires a particular acknowledgment.

“ 8. Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance;”

What does this therefore denote, which connects this verse with the foregoing, if not, that repentance is utterly unworthy of God’s mercy, when it is not at all answerable either to the number and greatness of our sins, or to the strength of our inveterate habits, or to the wrath and judgment of God which we have

deserved, or to the singularity of the grace, which has, as it were, snatched us away from sin and the divine wrath, while so many others are consumed thereby?

“—And begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”

Let us work out our own salvation ourselves, without depending upon what others do for us. If we do not imitate our fathers, their holiness will condemn us, instead of being serviceable to us, at the tribunal of God. None but God can form his own worshippers, as none but He can make true penitents. Christ informs us by this comparison, that repentance is a change, a transformation, and a new birth; and that so long as there is no appearance of new manners and a new life, there is no conversion nor true repentance.

“9. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

There is not one moment to be lost in the business of salvation. Whoever loses one, hazards all. The patience of God, infinite and eternal in itself, has its bounds and end in respect of sinners. A man can abuse God’s patience only in this life; but this life is in his hands, and perhaps his arm is even now lifted up to cut down this unprofitable tree. “Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit,” without exception, without regard to age, knowledge, dignity, or the purple wherewith a man is perhaps covered, all shall be “cut down and cast into the

fire," if they have not good works at the hour of death : and there can be none without charity, which is the root of them.

" 10. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?"

The first step of a true penitent is, to resign himself up to the conduct of an enlightened, prudent, and disinterested director. There is no plainer indication that a sinner's heart is really touched by God, and that the time of mercy is come, than his appearing docile, submissive, and ready to do every thing toward his own recovery. A sinner must receive the law, and not give it. It is an intolerable subversion of order, for a criminal to say to his judge, ' I will not do this;' and a judge to a criminal, ' What will you do?' But something like this is too often seen in the business of repentance, and we there find very few who say as they ought, ' What must I do?'

" 11. He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise."

One part of repentance, which here includes the other works of mercy, is to give that which is superfluous to the poor. John does not enjoin the sacrifices of the law, knowing their insufficiency, but the sacrifice of charity, which covers the multitude of sins. The love of God is comprehended under that of our neighbour, whom we ought to love and assist, only for the sake of God. Let us love to feed and clothe the poor. These works of charity are preferable to all others, as being the most necessary and indispensable. He who is not moved with his brother's misery, deserves to find God unmoved with his own.

“ 12. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13. And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.”

John here gives rules for public receivers, as to what concerns their particular employment. He teaches perfectly to distinguish the abuses of any state or condition of life from the condition itself. A wise preacher should be so far from disturbing either the peace of private consciences, or the public repose, by condemning necessary employments, that he ought carefully to promote both, by contenting himself with only retrenching the disorders and injustice of those who exercise them. To be exact in not permitting any abuses in employments of this nature, is to serve the state: and those loose casuists who allow and authorize them, are pernicious to governments, by rendering these employments odious to the people, by favouring their murmurings, by encouraging acts of injustice, and thereby giving occasion to rebellion and revolt.

“ 14. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.”

John here, in the last place, regulates the duties of military persons, and shows that no condition is excluded from salvation. The business of war is not in itself at all opposite thereto; since there have been not only Christian soldiers, but even great saints and generous martyrs of that profession. If all war was contrary to the gospel, John would not have allowed those who presented themselves before him

to continue in that state: however, it is certainly full of obstacles to salvation, which very few surmount. A state which is generally embraced either out of passion, or libertinism, or through a blind destination of birth, the exercises whereof are so violent and tumultuous, agrees but little with the exercises of Christianity or the spirit of the gospel, which is all peace, charity, and meekness. It is, notwithstanding, just and necessary, that there should be men to defend the state; but it is still more just and necessary, that this should not be done at the expense of salvation. The grace of God can do every thing: this is what ought to comfort those who intend to serve Him in serving their king and country.

SECT. III.—*St. John's Testimony of Christ. His Imprisonment.*

“ 15. ¶ And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not ;”

It was the design of God, in sending John, to fix the minds of the Jews upon the Messiah, and induce them to examine the Scriptures. The mortified life of a person devoted to religion, the edifying example of a holy priest, and the regular conduct of a faithful Christian, excite men to think of God, and awaken sinners quite asleep and senseless as to the business of salvation.

“ 16. John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:”

There is more difference betwixt the baptism of John and that of Christ, than there is betwixt water and fire. Nothing but the Spirit of God can wash the soul from all its impurities, and consume all its filth. Every thing is little before Jesus Christ, and the greatest saints are not worthy to be at his feet. Where then ought a great sinner to cast himself? and how could he dare present himself before him in prayer, had not he himself pressed him to come to him, and to hope every thing from him? He did not himself in person baptize the Jews, to whom John makes this promise; but it is He who baptizes both all Jews and Gentiles who are baptized, because it is his baptism which is given by his ministers, because it is in his name, by his authority, through his merits, by his invisible hand and Spirit, that every sinner is baptized, every heart is purified, that all sins are remitted, and every Christian is consecrated to God.

“ 17. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 18. And many other things, in his exhortation, preached he unto the people.”

In the church, the good and bad shall be mingled together till the last judgment: we must, in imitation of the patience of God, preserve peace and charity with all the world till that time. Every age passes away in this kind of separation of the chaff from the wheat; but the visible and universal separation shall not be till the end of all ages. John joins the separation made by the word of Christ, received or rejected, practised or contemned, with

the final separation ; because that the one depends on the other ; and because that, perhaps, as to most of those who heard him, there would be but a few days distance, or less, between them. Let us strive, while there is yet time, to avoid the miserable portion of the chaff.

“ 19. ¶ But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,”

A preacher cannot hold his peace in the midst of public crimes. John spared none in Herod, because he loved none of the good things, nor feared any of the evils, which he could confer or inflict upon him. Some persons would not have wanted fair pretences to persuade John to dissemble. He was not charged with Herod’s conduct : he ought to have cultivated his good-will, that he might be supported in the exercise of his ministry ; he ran the risk of frustrating all his plans, and destroying the fruit of all his preaching, by making him his enemy ; he exposed his disciples and his whole school to danger, &c. John did not reason after this manner ; he did what God required of him at that time, and left the future to him who is the disposer of it.

“ 20. Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.”

“ See what John has drawn upon himself by his imprudence,” would the worldly-wise say ; but the reflection of the wise according to Christ will be, “ See the worthy reward of his faithfulness in discharging his ministry, and of his holy freedom :” for the grace of martyrdom is the greatest in the Christian religion. Impurity, which is public and scan-

dalous, hardens the heart, and disposes a man to contemn and despise those who have a right to reprove him on God's part. It is very easy to pass from contempt to hatred, and from hatred to murder, or to such cruel usage as is almost equivalent to it.

SECT. IV.—*The Baptism and Genealogy of Christ.*

“ 21. ¶ Now, when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,”

Jesus is not ashamed to be found among the crowd of sinners, nor to take upon him the mark and remedy of sin. Let us from hence learn, how careful we ought to be not to judge rashly. That which is done visibly in the baptism of Christ, is done invisibly in that of his members. Heaven is therein opened, but it is by the prayer of the church, whereof its Head sets it the example. There is reason to believe, that in this action Christ said to his Father, that, according to his will, he took upon himself the sins of the world, in order to undergo the penance due to them, and to be the victim for them. Let us learn from him to join prayer with all the ceremonies of the church.

“ 22. And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him ; and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.”

The Father sets off and honours the humiliation of his Son, by the testimony which he gives of his divine extraction, and of the fulness of the Holy Spirit in him. Christ clothes himself with us and our sins by baptism; and we are clothed with him

and his righteousness in our own. Jesus alone is the delight of his Father: of whom then ought he not to be so? The Holy Spirit is for none but the children of God: we have no right to it, but only because it is the Spirit of our Father. The fulness of it is given to the Head for all the members; and it is only under this quality that we must beg of him any portion thereof.

" 23. ¶ And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,"

Jesus, in submitting to the law or custom, and not exercising his public ministry till at the age prescribed by them, condemns the forwardness and precipitation of many ecclesiastics. Who had more right than the Son of God to exempt himself from the ordinary rules? Whose ministry is as useful to the church, as his was necessary? He, who came on purpose to make known his Father, concealed himself for thirty years. But even the time of his silence and obscurity made part of his ministry. Thus he taught us the necessity of silence, labour, retirement, and humility, and merited for us the grace of them. What a treasure is this of the hidden life of Christ! what a source of blessings! But it is only for the little ones and the humble. This is the greatest of all his mysteries, at least as to the duration of it; and yet very few honour and acknowledge it. A man may deceive himself in thinking that he imitates his zeal and public labours. Even pride may imitate charity in performing eminent actions; but there is nothing but humility, which can love that humility and obscurity which Christ loved so much. The lesson of

humility and silence must needs be of the greatest importance, since to this Christ dedicated thirty years of his life and example, and reserved but three or four for all the other truths of the gospel.

- “ 24. Which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph,
25. Which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Amos, which was the son of Naum, which was the son of Esli, which was the son of Nagge,
26. Which was the son of Maath, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Semei, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Juda,
27. Which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri,
28. Which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Addi, which was the son of Cosam, which was the son of Elmodam, which was the son of Er, 29. Which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer, which was the son of Jorim, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, 30. Which was the son of Simeon, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Jonan, which was the son of Eliakim, 31. Which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David, 32. Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naassan, 33. Which was the son of Aminadab, which was the son of Aram, which was the son of Esrom, which was the son of

Phares, which was the son of Juda, 34. Which was the son of Jacob, which was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, which was the son of Thara, which was the son of Nachor, 35. Which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of Heber, which was the son of Sala, 36. Which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech, 37. Which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan, 38. Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God."

Jesus, the principle of the new creation, and the repairer of the world, disdains not to be reckoned amongst ordinary creatures, and among the children of sinful Adam. He designed hereby to secure us from having the least doubt that he was man; and to assure us that we have a Victim, a Saviour, and a High Priest, capable of compassionating our infirmities and miseries.

CHAPTER IV.

SECT. I.—*The Retirement, Fasting, and Temptation of Christ.*

" 1. AND Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,"

What ought they to do, who come from receiving

the sacrament, and from being filled with the Spirit of God, but to hide their treasure in retirement, and secure it from the corrupt air of the world? There is a mutual assistance betwixt the Spirit and retirement: for the Spirit of God received into the heart inspires the love of retirement, and retirement preserves the Spirit of God. Happy those whom the Spirit leads thither for life, and who shut the gate of their heart against those deceitful notions of false good, which the conversation of men continually renews! Happy at least those whom it leads thither from time to time, in order to purify their hearts from that corruption which daily and hourly slides into them.

“2. Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.”

The first Adam, being proud, sinned, and was overcome by gluttony in a delicious garden: Jesus Christ, the second Adam, humbled and abased, does penance, and triumphs by fasting in a frightful desert. Fasting is, in some sense, a remedy for present temptations, and a preservative against future. Jesus Christ spared not his innocent flesh; and the sinner cherishes his continually, refusing it nothing, and studying still to pamper it, as if this were the sole end of his being in the world. The temptation of Christ is a source of grace and strength for those who are tempted. By voluntarily submitting to the temptation of the devil, he teaches us that the sinner is necessarily exposed to it all the days of his life. Libertines will by no means be persuaded that the devil intermeddles with their affairs; and even this

illusion itself is a proof of the empire which he has over them. Men are never more dangerously tempted, than when they think themselves secure from being so.

“ 3. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.”

God hears not the prayers of those who tempt him through a spirit of curiosity, neither does he make himself known to such. Let us learn never to give ear to the wicked spirit, even though he should not require of us any thing which is evil. He seems sometimes to inspire such designs as tend only to the glory of God, and to the manifestation of Jesus Christ and his divinity; but his aim is to gain our confidence, to grow familiar with us, and to deceive us by false appearances of good. God is he to whom we must hearken; and Jesus Christ must be our Guide and Instructor.

“ 4. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”

Jesus teaches us to encounter temptation, 1. With the arms of God’s word, which is likewise the support of the soul. 2. By cleaving to him alone. 3. By humbly adoring him. 4. By declining all extraordinary ways.—Temporal want and necessity is one of those opportunities which the devil takes care to improve, in order to tempt us; but it ought never to induce us to hearken to his voice. We have a Father, who has enjoined us to beg of him our bread every day; he will certainly give us either that, or something better. It is a piece of infidelity to confine God

to one means alone, since he has in his hands more than we can possibly imagine.

“ 5. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.”

A victory over one temptation ought not to make us negligent, because the devil is continually raising up new ones. Adam resigned himself up to the power of the devil by his sin. Christ bears the punishment of it, and delivers him from it. His goodness is so great, that he suffers himself to be taken up by the devil, to the end that he may not abandon those to him who deserve most to be delivered up to his power, who call upon him, who give themselves to him, and who either consent, or wish that he may carry them away. Such are lunatics, incapable of making any contract, much less of contracting with the devil, (who is under an interdict by the authority of the supreme justice,) and concerning that whereof they have no power to dispose; since all mankind belong to Christ, through the price of his blood.

“ 6. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them ; for that is delivered unto me ; and to whomsoever I will I give it.”

These words of the devil contain three insolent lies, together with blasphemies against the sovereignty, justice, and providence of God. Would to God the devil had not amongst men imitators, pretending to be all-powerful absolute masters, and sovereign arbitrators of all things ! It is a dreadful judgment, when God does not humble them on earth, as he did Nebuchadnezzar, but reserves them to be humbled with him whose pride they imitate.

“ 7. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.”

The diabolical inclination to cause themselves to be worshipped, is, in some measure, in all the proud, and is a stronger temptation than that of carnal pleasures. Herod, to satisfy his passion, hazarded, by his foolish promise, no more than the half of his kingdom; but there are those who, like the devil, would give all they have to be worshipped. What can be said of those women, who join in themselves all the lasciviousness whereof the flesh is capable, and all the pride of the unclean spirit, but only that such are monsters more to be dreaded than the devil himself?

“ 8. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

One only God, one only religion. O my God, how little do we understand what it is to worship thee only! Men worship every thing which they love, every thing wherein they place their happiness: and the number of those who love none but thee, and who place their happiness in thee alone, is less than can be imagined.

“ 9. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence :”

How many are there, who come to the church, and are raised to the highest stations in it, only by the instigation of the devil, and in order to a more dismal fall! All advancement, which comes not

from God, cannot but be very dangerous. When God raises any one, he is, as it were, engaged by his goodness to support him, to prevent his fall, or to lift him up again: when the devil, that is, ambition, pride, or vanity, does it, the person so raised finds no strength but in his presumption, no vigilance but in his blindness, no help but in his own weakness. Lord, let me rather crawl on the earth, like a vile worm, than be abandoned to this diabolical elevation.

“ 10. For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee; 11. And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

The providence of God, in relation to his Son, to his church, and to all mankind, is a ground of confidence, but not of presumption. God is of himself sufficient to watch over us, and to defend us; and it is not through any necessity that he employs his angels on this account, but only to honour them, by rendering them the ministers of his providence, and causing them to co-operate with his designs concerning his Christ, his church, and his elect; to oblige them to enter into the mission, the ways, the charity, and the humility of his Son; to make known his love and fatherly care towards his elect; and to make them sensible, how intent the apostate angels are on their destruction, and how all creatures are rendered subservient to the design of man’s salvation, and that every thing is united in the church, whereof Jesus Christ is the head. A guardian angel is a guide for the way, not for a precipice; a help in our necessities, not in our passions; and a master to enlighten us, not to follow our blindness.

“ 12. And Jesus answering, said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

One manner of tempting God is, unnecessarily to expose ourselves to danger, through a false confidence in his assistance. It is part of the respect and obedience which we owe him, not to leave the common and ordinary way without his order. It is an extreme instance of ingratitude, to desire, by extraordinary effects and ways, to experience a goodness, wisdom, power, and providence, which so evidently show themselves, every moment, a thousand and a thousand different ways, which are so much the more to be admired, as they are more common and ordinary.

“ 13. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.”

The devil ceases to tempt us, only for a season, in order to lull us asleep: it is therefore a great folly, not to watch continually. He assaults with open force, those whom he has not been able to overcome by his stratagems, or by the allurements of the world. Thus he acted with respect to our blessed Lord, in the latter part of his life, and with respect to holy hermits after one manner, and to holy prelates after another. Let us learn, both from the Head and from the members, that we are not capable of overcoming the persecutions and outward assaults of the devil, if we have suffered ourselves to be overcome by the charms and allurements of the world and of sin.

SECT. II.—*Christ preaches in Galilee, and at Nazareth. Isaiah's Prophecy.*

“ 14. ¶ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee; and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.”

Who is there, after the example of Christ, so faithful as not to take one step, but by the direction of God’s Spirit. When a man, in entering into a state which is exposed to the temptation of applause, neither consults the Spirit, nor follows its motions; such a one, after having overcome the temptations of the world and of riches, miserably yields to that of vanity, and is lost with the fruit of his victories. When the fame of an evangelical labourer is gone abroad in the world, wo be to him if he goes abroad with it, and follows it, instead of retiring within his own heart, and recollecting himself there with Jesus Christ.

“ 15. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.”

After having been filled with the Holy Ghost, after having fasted, prayed, and overcome vanity, and all other temptations, a man may then begin with some confidence to instruct others, if God call him thereto. To be honoured by all, and yet to preserve humility, is a virtue to be found only among Christians, and which is very rare even amongst the most perfect. Whoever has not laboured beforehand, in retirement, and by prayer, to mortify his mind and body, runs the risk of being carried away by the wind of vanity.

“ 16. ¶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had

been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and stood up for to read."

The constancy of Christ, in performing the common duties of religion, at the congregations of the faithful, and at public prayers, appears every where. The synagogue was to him the place of assembling, as the parish church is to us, and he was always very far from forsaking it.

" 17. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias: and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,"

Jesus Christ exercises the office of reader, out of respect to the word of his Father, in order to render the use of it profitable to the people, to add authority to the prophecies, and to lay before the eyes of the Jews such as were most capable of opening them to see the coming of the Messias whom they expected. It was the consolation of the Jewish church and people, to feed on the word of God, to contemplate Christ in the enigmatic representation which his Spirit had given of him, and to render the prophecies which promised him familiar to their minds. How much more joy, delight, and profit, ought we Christians then to find in reading the New Testament, in the history of our blessed Saviour's life and mysteries fully accomplished, and in meditating on his virtues, his precepts, and the ways he has there traced out to us.

" 18. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted,"

The truth of these words of Isaiah, (who was the

evangelical prophet of Christ, and had so long before received a portion of his Spirit, to foretel and make him known as the true Deliverer,) was evidently fulfilled in this divine Saviour, in whom unchangeably resides the fulness of the Holy Spirit, in which his unction and sacerdotal consecration does consist, which began in the incarnation, wherein the human nature (personally united to the Word, by the power of the Father, and the co-operation of the Holy Ghost,) was anointed with the Divinity itself, and thereby consecrated to an eternal priesthood. All the functions of this new Prophet, with regard to men, are exercised on the heart; and the grace, by which he operates therein, is a grace of healing, deliverance, and illumination, which, by an admirable virtue, causes them to pass from sickness to health, from slavery to liberty, from darkness to light, and from the lowest degree of misery to the supreme and eternal happiness.

“ — To preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; 19. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

The whole series of ages, from the preaching of Christ even to his second coming, is but, as it were, one year, some few days or hours whereof are allowed us to prepare ourselves for the judgment of God. These are moments of mercy, hours of grace, days of salvation, and the year of the true jubilee or of remission of sin. Let us not suffer them to slide away from us: the time of wrath will soon follow, wherein our works alone must answer for us.

“ 20. And he closed the book, and he gave it

again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him."

Let us accustom ourselves to have our mind and heart fastened or fixed on Jesus Christ, that we may receive with profit his word and inspirations. If his reputation, his mein, and his modesty, rendered the Jews so attentive to his words, and so intent on his person; what impression ought we to feel, after all we know of him, and all we have received from him!

" 21. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Jesus Christ is the accomplishment of all the prophecies, types, and promises. This he declares himself, to make known his mission, and to authorize it by the Scriptures, after having already done it by miracles, and by the testimony of John. This truth manifests itself every where, that an extraordinary mission ought to be rejected, if it be not proved by miracles, which are the voice of God.

Sect. III.—No Prophet accepted in his own Country. The People of Nazareth endeavour to cast Christ down headlong.

" 22. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? 23. And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country."

The words of Jesus Christ are all grace and spiritual unction to those who read or hear them with

faith. Infidelity itself does not always hinder men from perceiving that they are the words of almighty God. It is not from worldly friends or relations, that we must expect the approbation of any thing which we do for the sake of God. Christ would be every where, and in all his conditions, an object of faith ; in his birth, in his preaching, and in his death. The poverty of his life and of his parents is an occasion of offence to the proud, as well as his manger and his cross. Whoever once thoroughly comprehends, that the way of Jesus Christ is a way of humility, will not be in the least surprised to meet with it every where, and would rather wonder to find it wanting on any occasion. He who measures truth by the extraordinary figure, the talents, or the nobility of those who preach it, is in great danger of embracing error, and rejecting truth.

“ 24. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.”

The pride of man is very frequently deceived : he would fain make a figure where he is most known, and that is the very place where he generally loses the credit he has obtained. A priest, a preacher of the gospel, ought to be a Melchisedec, of whom we should know nothing, but only that he is a minister of Christ, who worthily preaches his truth, and is the first to put it in practice. These people could not reproach Christ with any other defect, but the poverty of his kindred ; and yet they despised him, notwithstanding his reputation and miracles. What fruit then can those persons hope for, whose faults are very evident in great numbers, and whose life is too much known, and altogether contrary to what

they preach? If Jesus Christ does so little good among his friends and acquaintance, who is that priest, who, being fond of his relations, can be very useful to them?

“ 25. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; 26. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.”

The more destitute a man is of human aid, the more ought he to trust to that providence which God is pleased to exert in extreme necessity. A woman, whom her sex, poverty, widowhood, and foreign country, rendered contemptible to the eyes of the flesh, is she whom God chooses preferably to all others; because she was rich in faith, and lived on this bread of the soul, whilst that of the body was wanting to her. How good is it to lay up a stock of provision of this invisible bread, which supplies the want of every thing. To depend upon this treasure for the future, is to depend upon the inexhaustible riches of our heavenly Father. This famine of three years and a half, prefigures the famine of faith among the Jewish people during the public life of the Messias. Give me, Lord, some of this bread, on which every soul lives which lives for God. Let me learn to prefer the poor before the rich, seeing that in all ages thou makest choice of the former, to enrich them with the treasure of faith.

“ 27. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”

The choice of this stranger, is a figure of the calling of the Gentiles to the baptism of Christ, as also of the small number of the elect. Few sinners are justified by baptism and repentance, if we consider well the number of those who die without having partaken of the one, and without having profited by the other. By the examples of the widow, and of Naaman, both of them aliens, God plainly shows, that the dispensation of his grace is altogether free, that it is due to none, and yet that no sort of persons whatsoever are excluded from it.

“ 28. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,”

Truth provokes those whom it does not enlighten and convert. Of how great importance is it for men to bring along with them a good disposition towards the word of God, and the truths of Christianity; otherwise they may hurt, instead of profiting them! The proud man cannot bear to be told that God owes him nothing; and hereby he renders himself still more unworthy of his grace: he rises up against his Physician, instead of turning his anger against his pride, and desiring the cure of it. My God, how few are willing to acknowledge that the cause of their infidelity is in themselves, and that the source and principle of all grace lies in the mercy of God alone! The world is, even at this day, provoked, whenever, after Christ’s example, we endeavour to show it, that the number of those who are saved is very small.

“ 29. And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down head-

long. 30. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way,"

This action of the inhabitants of Nazareth, is a dreadful instance of that dereliction with which those are often punished, who, instead of receiving the truth which is preached to them, persecute those who preach it. It renders those worse who oppose it. The sinner is incensed when he is reproached with his vices; and he himself justifies these reproaches, by giving himself up to his passions. The wicked disposition of this people, shows itself in the treatment which they give the most amiable of men; whereas the goodness and mortification of Christ appear in the choice he made of their city, to pass therein almost his whole life. These hearts, which an example so holy, and exposed so many years to their sight, could not touch, make it very evident that nothing external can be of any advantage to us, unless internal grace causes us to make a good use of it.

SECT. IV.—*Jesus preaches at Capernaum. The unclean Devil. Peter's Wife's Mother.*

"31. And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath-days."

Christ teaches his first ministers, not pertinaciously to continue preaching the truth to such as will not hear it, but to carry it to another place. He plainly shows that he does not seek his own satisfaction in the places whither he goes to preach; since, though Capernaum was so impenitent, that it will be more tolerable even for Sodom in the day of judgment than for it, yet he did not refuse to live there

almost two years, to preach there continually, and to work there an infinite number of miracles. Men are very far from following their own inclinations so little.

“ 32. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.”

The word of Jesus Christ, in his own mouth, is full of force and power: he imparts some of this power to those amongst his ministers who are entirely his. This city, which our blessed Lord chose for an extraordinary example of impenitence, shows that men may be struck with the truths of salvation, and admire the force of the preacher, without receiving any benefit at all from the sermon. Let preachers learn from hence, not to lay any great stress on the applause, esteem, and admiration of men; for these often give them abundance of praises, and yet very few are profited by what they have delivered.

“ 33. ¶ And in the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice,”

He who has his soul possessed with uncleanness, is far more miserable than he whose body only is possessed with a devil. Were our faith as lively as our sense, it would be much more frightened at that innumerable company of persons spiritually possessed, with which it daily meets, than we are, when only one of the other kind is exposed to our sight. An unchaste person appears, to the eyes of the mind, much more a demoniac than any other sinner. Our having so little abhorrence of such, is a sign that we are not yet in a capacity to judge well of the opposition which there is betwixt the Spirit of God and the unclean spirit, betwixt grace and sin.

“ 34. Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.”

Whoever lives in criminal pleasures, cannot endure that any one should disturb his miserable peace. There are some who praise the saints, as the devil here does Jesus Christ, being forced by God’s appointment to publish him as the Holy One, though, in all appearance, he did not know him to be the Son of God. God permits the wicked, in like manner, to preach truths, which will only serve to their condemnation, as well as to that of the devil. My God, how great a difference is there betwixt speaking of the holiness of God and Christ, and imitating it! A man may be a devil, and yet talk well concerning God; but it is the property of his children to form themselves by the holiness of their heavenly Father.

“ 35. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.”

A good man ought to reject the praises of scandalous persons, and not spare their vices for the sake of their flatteries. It is a terrible judgment on those who abuse the word of God in the pulpit, or elsewhere, to the corrupting the understanding or the heart, that he does not strike them dumb, as he did this devil. Their impunity serves only to heap up treasures of sin and wrath, and to harden their hearts the more. They have no power of doing hurt any more than the devil, but only so far as God permits them.

“ 36. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this ! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. 37. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about.”

It is a very beneficial and Christian practice, frequently to invoke upon ourselves, and upon persons engaged in uncleanness, the authority and power which Jesus Christ has over the unclean spirit. We have all of us a living fountain of uncleanness in concupiscence ; and the devil makes greater use of it than we imagine, in order to tempt us. It is a very great occasion for fear and trembling, to perceive, by the means of bodily possession, how great the power is which the enemy of our salvation has over us ; but it is a very great ground of confidence, to see, by the empire which Christ exercises over him, how powerful the Author of our salvation is. We do not make sufficient use of that portion of this authority and power which he has communicated to the church ; and a sinner, or a just man tempted, would experience, to his advantage, how great it is, if he would, as one may say, exercise his heart in secret by the prayers of the church.

“ 38. ¶ And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon’s house : and Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever ; and they besought him for her. 39. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever ; and it left her : and immediately she arose, and ministered unto them.”

Scarce has Peter begun to belong to Christ, but his family finds the good effects of it immediately,

even as to bodily health: so advantageous is it to contract an acquaintance with good men. One single person, acceptable to God, draws down abundance of blessings on a whole family. It is by means of prayer that a man may be most serviceable to a family; and it is a great piece of infidelity not to employ it for the fever of sin, when it rages there, with as much earnestness as is used on the account of the fever of the body. Christ rebukes this so absolutely, on purpose to show us what power he has over that of the heart, to cure it. He stooped down over the sick person, to show that it was by his humiliations that he was pleased to merit this power; and to teach his ministers to humble themselves, and compassionate the infirmities of sinners, in order to heal them.

SECT. V.—*The Diseased healed. Devils confess Christ. He retires into a desert place.*

“ 40. ¶ Now, when the sun was setting,* all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.” [**Fr.* After the setting of the sun.]

That which Christ did, by his bodily hands, in the diseases of the body, he does every day in those of the soul by his invisible hand, which is his sovereign medicinal grace. It was not till after the setting of the sun, after the death of Christ, that the multitude of the nations was, by preaching, brought to him; that he healed them by the faith of his incarnation, and by the application of the merits of the mysteries accomplished in his flesh; and that imposition of hands in his name was used in the church.

“ 41. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God. And he, rebuking them, suffered them not to speak : for they knew that he was Christ.”

The testimony of the wicked is sometimes useful to good men, though they ought not to be pleased with hearing it. It was not from the father of lies, but from Jesus Christ himself, from the Scriptures, and from the church, that his people were to learn the mystery of the incarnation and coming of the Messias. The evil spirit is an enemy of salvation, with whom the people of God ought to have no commerce, and who is unworthy and incapable of preaching Jesus Christ.

“ 42. And when it was day, he departed, and went into a desert place ; and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them.”

Evangelical labourers ought, from time to time, to enter into retirement, after preaching, and the other functions which respect their neighbour. It is good that a preacher should love to fly from the world. A commendable zeal this in the people of Capernaum for Christ and his word ; which shows, that as God has his own people in the midst of this world, though separated from it from all eternity, so in a city he has his faithful people, mixed with the unfaithful : a penitent Capernaum, which loves his word, which seeks, finds, and detains him with diligence and earnestness ; and an impenitent and reprobate Capernaum, which, by its pride, exalts itself to heaven, and which, by the justice of God, shall be brought down to hell, and cast even lower

than Sodom; a Capernaum chosen through mercy, and a Capernaum abandoned with justice.

“ 43. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent.”

Those who do not sufficiently value the word of God, and neglect to hear it, because they have every day the opportunity of doing it, will perhaps one day know how desirable it is, when it shall be taken from them. Let us profit by the men of God, and by the truths which they preach to us: we often wish for them in vain, when God, for our punishment, withdraws them from us. It is neither the inclination of the people, nor that of the preacher, nor any prospect of great advantage, which ought to determine an evangelical labourer to one place rather than to another, but the mission, the known will of God, and the appointment of superiors.

“ 44. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.”

Preaching being the proper function of Jesus Christ, and of bishops who represent him, we need not wonder that the Prince of pastors and Bishop of our souls is so intent upon it. His fidelity and constancy in propagating the gospel in cities and villages, is the condemnation of those who desert his flock, and leave it without instruction.

CHAPTER V.

SECT. I.—*The miraculous Draught of Fishes. The Admiration and Calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, 2. And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.”

The haste and forwardness of people is often very deceitful and fruitless. We see them every where running in crowds after Christ; and yet almost the whole body of the Jewish people continued in incredulity. Let us distrust our desires and our fervours, so long as our works are not answerable to them. The confidence and affection which persons have towards any director of the conscience, how holy soever he be, are much to be suspected when no fruit of them appears. The pastoral charge is a burdensome office to those who endeavour to perform all the duties of it; but the sovereign Pastor alleviates the weight of it, by bearing it himself, both in his own person, and in those of his ministers who undertake it for his sake.

“ 3. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.”

The true church is that which, by the purity of its faith, is like this bark, loosed from the earth, which pro-

fesses Jesus Christ, which is the school in which the chair of truth resides, whereon Christ continually sits, to teach, sanctify, govern, and comfort his people, and to co-operate with his ministers. By this thrusting out from the land, he teaches his ministers not to contract too great a familiarity with the world; to preserve their authority, and the respect of the people, by a life more retired and holy than that of the laity; to labour, so as neither to be wanting in their duty, nor to overburden themselves; to secure themselves from the contagion of sinners and of sin; to retire from time to time, &c. He prays Peter, when he could as well command him; that he may, by his own example, as well as his words, condemn the spirit of domineering, and the haughty and imperious carriage of superior towards inferior ministers.

“ 4. Now, when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.”

No man ought to cast the net of God’s word, but by his order, his mission, and that of his vicegerents. When Jesus Christ had left speaking to men, the church, spreading itself abroad into all nations, was, as it were, launched out into the deep, by the apostles and their successors. It is this bark alone which carries Jesus Christ as far as the new world; to this is reserved the grace of converting all people; and it is by the nets belonging to it, that souls are drawn into this bark.

“ 5. And Simon answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net.”

This mysterious fishing represents that of souls. In vain the preacher labours to convert them, if God gives not his blessing. It is upon his grace that he must rely, and not upon his own eloquence and strength. The fishing of the night, is an unsuccessful and unfortunate fishing, without light, without mission, without Christ's assistance, in a bark where he is not, and without his direction. This is the fishing of heretics and schismatics, and of such as wait not for his command by the mouth of the successors of the apostles. The fishing of the day is a blessed fishing, which is carried on by the light of faith, in the sight of the Sun of Righteousness, with confidence in the promise of his assistance to the end of the world, and in the mid-day of truth. This is the fishing of the ministers of the church.

“ 6. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes ; and their net brake.”

The weak ought to take great care not to be scandalized at seeing the nets of the church sometimes break. It is a misfortune which proceeds from the multitude. Heretics break the net of the church, when they corrupt the word of God, and the purity of the faith: schismatics, when they break her union ; wicked ministers, when they despise her authority, setting up for workmen of their own accord, without subordination to the hierarchical pastors, without union with their fellow-labourers, and without dependence on the order of the church ; and, lastly, vicious Christians, when they violate her discipline, when they will not submit to her rules concerning the administration of the sacraments, when they corrupt the sanctity of her manners by a scandalous life, and by the breach of their baptismal vows.

“ 7. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.”

The apostolical charity is very far from choosing rather to leave souls to perish, than to have companions and fellow-labourers in serving them. It is an intolerable pride to think nothing well done, but what we do ourselves ; and a diabolical envy to be afraid lest others should do better than we. And is it not also a deplorable and schismatical ambition, from helps and assistants, to set up for masters and chiefs ? The more the number of labourers has increased in the church, the less choice and exactness has there been used in admitting them into it; and very many seemed to have entered for no other end, but only to break the bonds of peace, and to overturn and sink its discipline.

“ 8. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

He who has a lively belief of the holiness of God and of Christ, can scarce suffer himself to remain in their presence. A pastor truly humble, cannot conceive how God should make choice of him to serve him ; though he knows very well, that the glory of grace appears so much the more illustrious, as its instruments are more weak and less proper for its work. We honour God by lifting ourselves up to him, and approaching him with confidence ; we likewise honour him by abasing ourselves before him, and by removing, as it were, at a distance from him by humility.

“ 9. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken :”

How much more wonderful was the draught of souls which Peter took, after he had received the Holy Ghost ! Great success astonishes a faithful minister, because he is in fear for his humility, without which he loses himself in saving others. The joy which we receive from hence should not hinder us from applying ourselves to admire the power of God in his works, and from making use of them to increase and heighten our idea of it, and our reverence for it.

“ 10. And so was also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not ; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”

If the bare figures of the all-powerful operation of grace in the heart of sinners, in order to draw them to God, be so surprising ; how must it then be, when we feel this operation itself in our own ? They who continue still incredulous, after having seen all the world converted unto Christ, will be condemned by the example of these apostles, whom only one miraculous draught of fish transported with admiration.

“ 11. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.”

The effect of miracles should be, to make us forsake every thing which keeps us from serving God. Visible miracles cannot be of any advantage to men, unless God is pleased to work an invisible one, in order to cause them to make a good use of the other.

The former are a voice, which speaks to the senses ; there must also be one, which may speak to the heart. I ought to render thanks to thee, O Lord, for the miracles recorded here, since it was by means of these that thou first gavest us apostles, and drewst after thee the fathers of our faith.

SECT. II.—*The Leper. Retirement and Prayer.*

“ 12. ¶ And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy ; who, seeing Jesus, fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

A prayer, humble and full of faith, is necessary in order to obtain the cure of the leprosy of sin. True faith speaks little, but sighs much. He who is sensible of his own unworthiness, is extremely willing to depend upon the pure bounty of God. The confusion of a sinner, at the sight of him whom he has offended, hinders him from lifting up his eyes towards him, and makes him hide his face in the dust ; but trust and confidence causes him to pray. How universal soever the corruption of a heart, full of the leprosy of sin, may be ; yet it cannot be incurable to him who is the universal physician, the plenitude of holiness, and the Almighty. No, Lord, I will never despair but of myself, and I will eternally hope in thee, notwithstanding the number of my sins, and the deepness of my wounds.

“ 13. And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.”

When it is the will of God to save a soul, and he touches it powerfully with the internal hand of his

grace, no human will resists him. That which he performs by himself on this leper, he does in all ages by the ministry of his church. It is the hand indeed of the priest which is stretched forth upon the humbled sinner, it is his voice which is heard; but it is the will and power of Christ which makes the sinner clean.

“ 14. And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”

Not to shun applause in performing good works, and chiefly in serving souls, is to expose our wealth and treasure to robbers. What blessing soever God is pleased to give to the extraordinary and subsidiary labourers of the church in the direction of souls, they ought to imitate Christ, in still inspiring them with a submission to ordinary pastors. We follow the appointment of God, when we do nothing but with regard to them. Miracles are for the edification of some, and the condemnation of others. Nothing ever was more wise, more exact, more submissive to God and the church, and more peaceable with respect to men, than the conduct of Christ. They who will not imitate it, are not worthy to serve souls.

“ 15. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. 16. ¶ And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.”

It is sometimes necessary, after the example of Christ, to prefer retirement and prayer to the exercise of charity, when the objects of it crowd upon us

in too great numbers. It is for the advantage of souls, as well as of ministers, that these should be absent from those for a time. To speak to God in behalf of souls, is not to forsake them. It is the most effectual way of serving them, for a man to purify himself by retirement, that he may serve them the better, and to replenish himself with God and his truths, that so he may dispense them in greater abundance, and after a more holy manner. When a great reputation pursues us, we must fly from it as from a thief, either into the wilderness if we can, or at least into the fortress of prayer and humility.

SECT. III.—*The Paralytic.*

“ 17. And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.”

Jesus is full of a beneficent and healing virtue: the only way to feel the effects of it, is to approach him by faith, and to invoke him with the sighs of the heart. He does not perform his miracles, only before the simple and ignorant; he exposes them to the sight of those who are best able to judge of them: this is not the manner of deceivers. These doctors having a perfect knowledge of the prophecies, God brings them hither to this end, that they may apply them to the miracles of Christ, and have every thing which is necessary in order to discover his mission, and to receive him as the Messias. I adore, O Saviour of the world, both the extent of thy charity, and the foresight of thy wisdom, in respect of those

who most abused them. They never returned thee any thanks for them, I praise and bless thee for them, in their stead.

“ 18. ¶ And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him.”

The world is full of false friends, who flatter us in our evil inclinations, which are the bed of the sinner’s fatal repose; but where can we find such as these, who will earnestly endeavour to obtain a cure for us? We place friendship and generosity in advancing a friend to offices, employments, or dignities, which is, in truth, very often only putting him into the way of damnation, or exposing him to the immediate occasions of offending God. True friendship consists in taking a friend out of the way of sin and perdition, in carrying him to Christ, in bringing him into his house, which is the church, and in laying him, as it were, before him, by admonitions, instructions, reading, reflections, prayers, &c.

“ 19. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the house-top, and let him down through the tiling, with his couch, into the midst before Jesus.”

God often grants to the faith, prayers, and charity of others, the conversion of a sinner, who does not in the least think of God. Nothing seems impossible to charity. We ought to try all ways to approach Christ; we must place ourselves in his sight, and put ourselves into a condition of receiving his mercy. God very frequently permits great obstacles to conversion, on purpose to make it the more desired,

to try the faith of those who pray for it, to oblige them to use extraordinary endeavours, and to show them, that it is only from God through Jesus Christ that they are to expect it.

“ 20. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.”

In our prayers, Christ often hearkens more to our wants, than our desires. He goes to the very root of the evil, which is sin; and we ought to imitate him in our afflictions. They who, out of a spirit of charity, pray for others, receive frequently more than they ask. God interprets their prayers; because he understands better what charity asks in them, than they do themselves.

“ 21. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

The wicked change the best remedies into poison, and abuse the most sacred truths. There is none more full of consolation, than to learn, that he who forgives sins has placed on earth the throne of his grace and mercy; and yet men set themselves against this truth, and to this end shut their eyes and ears against prophecies and miracles. Those who so violently oppose this doctrine, have the misfortune to succeed the Pharisees and other incredulous Jews in this error; but believers have the comfort of having this remedy always ready, and always present.

“ 22. But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he, answering, said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?”

True charity is never provoked, nor discouraged in promoting the salvation of souls. He who knows

the bottom of the heart, and clearly sees its most secret wounds, is the only physician who can heal them. This reproof, so mild and charitable, opens not the eyes of these blind wretches, because they think themselves too clear-sighted: and because there is no blindness more incurable than that of envy.

“ 23. Whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?”

That which God does, in relation to the life of the body, shows us plainly what his charity and power do, as to the eternal life of our souls. It is an instance of the power and greatness of God, to render these words, “ Thy sins are forgiven thee,” efficacious in the mouth of his ministers, being sinners, as well as in that of the most holy Jesus: because it is he who speaks them, throughout the whole church. Jesus Christ does now no longer make use of external miracles, to persuade men of this truth; but the faith which makes it believed, is an internal miracle, which is wrought in the heart of all the faithful, and becomes sensible of their works.

“ 24. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go unto thine house.”

The mercy of Jesus Christ is as sovereign, and his grace as powerful over the soul, as his word is over the body. Whoever humbly resigns himself up to it, will never be deceived. Christ has upon earth, not only during his life, and in his own person, but also after his death, in his church, even unto the end of the world, the power to forgive all kinds of sin.

“ 25. And immediately he rose up before them,

and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God."

That which we have to do after conversion, is,

1. To become docile and obedient to the word of God.
2. Earnestly to endeavour to destroy and take away from before the eyes of the world the marks and remainders of our sins.
3. To go into retirement as much as we can.
4. To live in the spirit of acknowledgment.
5. To have no longer any other thoughts or desires, but only of departing to our own house, to that celestial and eternal habitation prepared for us in our proper country.
6. To pass the rest of our lives, until we are recalled home, in glorifying God, by directing all our actions to him, and doing nothing but what tends to his glory.

" 26. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day."

The conversion of a soul generally surprises the world ; but the church glorifies God for it, because it makes known his power. How much more does she glorify him for the cure of so many spiritual paralytics throughout the world, in whom the wonders of the divine grace so conspicuously shine forth ? Did we but apply ourselves more to the consideration of God's conduct over souls, we should then experience in ourselves all the different affections which we read of here ; astonishment, fear, and admiration of the greatness of God. If men feel all this in seeing God dispose absolutely of a sick body, incapable of resisting ; how much more must they needs feel, in seeing him like a God dispose as he pleases of all hearts, even the most rebellious, with-

out the least infringement of their liberty: which the more weak and diseased it is, resists him so much the more, and is healed only by ceasing to resist him?

SECT. IV.—*The Calling of St. Matthew. The whole need not a Physician. The piece of New Cloth. Old Vessels.*

“ 27. ¶ And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.”

See here the order of a sinner’s salvation:—1. God’s looking upon him denotes his predestination. 2. His command, his vocation. 3. St. Matthew’s obedience shows his justification. 4. His feast represents that of the eucharistic communion, and the heavenly banquet which makes his glorification. The looks of Christ are not unprofitable, and cast on men by chance; they have their cause in the eternal designs of the divine mercy. I have this confidence, O my God, that I am of the number of those upon whom thou hast, from all eternity, looked with that eye of grace and goodness which decrees salvation, determines the means, and regulates the whole economy of it. Thy present mercies are to me a pledge of thy eternal mercy.

“ 28. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. 29. ¶ And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans, and of others, that sat down with them.”

There are four marks of a true conversion:—1. To rise up, by quitting the occasions of sin. 2. To follow Jesus Christ, by doing good works. 3. To

be full of acknowledgment for the mercy of God.

4. To draw others to Christ.—A man is no longer of the world when he renounces its maxims, and makes no difficulty of declaring himself openly a disciple of Jesus Christ. The table of a rich publican is not very proper for the disciples of Christ, unless he carry them to it himself, and his Spirit be there with them.

“ 30. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?”

Hypocrites and envious persons are always ready to murmur, and to censure the best things. Men often hide, under a false zeal for perfection, a real pride, which criticises upon every thing, is offended at every thing, and complains of every thing; and which naturally tends to make inferiors dissatisfied with their superiors. Christ ate with all sorts of persons; but never at court, nor with any of the priests, to inform us, that there is very rarely any good to be done with such persons when once they are corrupted, and that we rather run the hazard of being corrupted by them ourselves.

“ 31. And Jesus answering, said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.”

Jesus, the sovereign Physician of souls, generally heals none but those who own themselves sick. Miserable is that person who imagines he has no need of him. Here are words very comfortable for humble and penitent sinners; but very dreadful for the proud. But it is this very pride itself, which is our great disease. I do acknowledge it, O Lord,

I lay it before thee, and humbly confess the extreme want which I have of thee. Every thing in me stands in need of a cure, O thou only Physician of my soul; and I glory in not being able to recover without thy assistance and remedies.

“ 32. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Sin, then, is the true disease; righteousness is health; Jesus, the Physician; repentance the remedy: and grace causes men to know, desire, and seek for health, to love and receive the remedy, and makes the remedy effectual. There are two sorts of calls to repentance, the one external by the word, which is common to all, and which of itself produces nothing; the other internal by grace, which is proper only to those who either desire it through a beginning and imperfect vocation, or make use of it through one which is perfect and consummate. Those who will not take the remedy of repentance, are either such as are in a frenzy, who do not think themselves sick; or in despair, who think themselves past cure; or fools, who care not for health; or children, who know not the value of it; or inconsiderate, who believe they can do well enough without remedies; or delicate and effeminate, who cannot bear the sharpness of them; or fantastical, who will not trust themselves to the most skilful physicians; or abandoned wretches, who have none.

“ 33. ¶ And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?”

Hypocrites are always apt, 1. To blame others.

2. To extol their own actions. 3. To esteem that most which appears to the eyes of men. 4. To glory in resembling those whose holiness is the most eminent. 5. To pass their lives in comparing themselves with others, not in order to imitate those who do better, but to undervalue and decry them; nor yet to assist those who seem not to do so well, but only to insult them.—It is great wisdom to apply ourselves but little to the examination of what others do, for fear of meeting with a snare in their defects, or even in their very virtues. None but the humble can do it to their advantage, because they profit by every thing, continually taking occasion to humble themselves more and more.

“ 34. And he said unto them, Can ye make the * children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them ? 35. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” [* *Fr. Friends of the bridegroom.*]]

The friends of the bridegroom, even when they do not fast, have the essential part of repentance, since they have love, without which repentance cannot be true, and with which a man cannot but hate sin. Jesus Christ exempts not his friends from the austerities of repentance, but prepares them for them. He begins with the heart which is most sick and feeble, and which must become most healthy and strong. After their internal renovation, which was completed on the day of Pentecost, the apostles led only a life of fasting, mortification, and prayer. It is now the time for our austerities to succeed, and to be united to the sufferings of Christ; for us to continue them

in our life, and to bear his quickening mortification in our mortal flesh. Those who are the ministers of penance, are not the masters of it ; they ought to keep close to the rules of the gospel, and of the church, and not to extend that dispensation, which Christ confined to the time of his presence on earth, to a time wherein he himself has declared that his disciples should fast.

“ 36. ¶ And he spake also a parable unto them : No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old : if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.”

It is no less necessary thoroughly to understand the constitution of souls, in order to conduct them well, than it is to understand that of bodies, in order to manage them rightly, and to cure them. A piece of new cloth is good, but not for an old garment or habit. The more excellent things are in themselves, the less proper are they for such as are imperfect, or but beginners. The more weak the sick person is, the less capable is he of strong remedies. In this consists the art of spiritual, as well as bodily physicians, to understand their patients thoroughly, to know all sorts of good remedies, and to give them properly and seasonably.

“ 37. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles ; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. 38. But new wine must be put into new bottles ; and both are preserved.”

It is an essential part of good conduct, in relation to souls, to proportion the external part of piety to

the internal, the work to the strength, the labour to the ability of every one. A man thinks it good husbandry to put his new wine into old vessels; and he thereby ruins himself. He thinks to advance a soul very fast, by putting it immediately on that which is most perfect; and he, by so doing, sometimes sets it very far backward. The business is, not for a man to teach the soul under his direction whatever good he knows himself; but to feed it with truths in proportion to its wants, and according to the strength of its spiritual stomach, and to cause it to practise them according to the measure of its grace.

“ 39. No man also, having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new; for he saith, The old is better.”

As old habits are difficult to be overcome, great regard must be had to them at first. It is rashness in a spiritual director to undertake that which grace sometimes performs all at once. Habits are ordinarily corrected only by other habits; and there must be time to form them; because, in order to obtain the grace of them, much prayer, labour, and meditation on God’s law, are necessary. If we do not earnestly beg the relish of Christian truths, and the love of the wholesome rigour of the gospel, the new law of Jesus Christ will always appear to us a paradox, and his new yoke an insupportable one.

CHAPTER VI.

SECT. I.—*The Ears of Corn plucked, and the Withered Hand cured, on the Sabbath-day.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn-fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands.”

Of the three Sabbath-days accounted the most solemn, as falling in with the three great feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, the second of these three chief, or principal, was that of Pentecost. The rubbing of the ears of corn by the apostles, is a circumstance which informs us how far Christ and his disciples were from making better cheer on festivals than on other days, since they were at that time in want even of bread. How much does this condemn those Christians, who distinguish holidays, and the times of the dedication of their churches, from common and ordinary days, by nothing but feastings and rejoicings altogether carnal !

“ 2. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath-days ?”

A false zeal for the law blinds men, and hinders them from understanding it rightly. See here false religion, and false tenderness of conscience, whereby, under pretence of promoting the interest of God, men satisfy their own malice and envy. The chief Sabbath, is for a man to shut his heart against sin, to cause the works of pride to cease ; in it to honour

and imitate the love of God, who did every thing for man in the six days of the creation, and who makes even the rest of the seventh subservient to his ease and comfort.

“ 3. And Jesus, answering them, said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungered, and they which were with him;”

The saints, even after their death, are beneficial to their neighbour by their example. Princes and persons in authority ought to act with great circumspection; because their example serves, as it were, instead of a law, either as to good or evil, and more as to the latter than the former. The bad examples of private men seldom make any impression but in their lifetime; that of kings is of fatal consequence in succeeding ages. Christ here teaches us to justify kings, and favourably to interpret their actions, as often as we can, and to be very far from giving a bad construction and a malicious turn to them.

“ 4. How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shew-bread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?”

The Spirit of God and charity give to pious men a liberty which the world understands not. Charity has a right over the most holy things, to make them serviceable to men in their necessities, because it is the first of laws, and because that God, who is charity itself, freely yields to man the use and profit of his good things, provided he still pay him the homage and service due for them. The use which charity makes of holy things, cannot profane their consecra-

tion, since it is charity which consecrates every thing to God. To preserve the life of a man, who is the creature and image of God, is to preserve a good which belongs to him.

“ 5. And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.”

He who has bestowed on man the six first days, that he may therein provide for the necessities of this present life, and reserved to himself the seventh, has not taken from himself the power to dispose of this, as well as of the others, in favour of man. If every thing be allowed to man, even that which God seems to have reserved to himself; how much more just is it, that every thing should be returned to God, by our acknowledgment and love?

“ 6. ¶ And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. 7. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath-day; that they might find an accusation against him.”

Charity profits even by that which is evil; envy poisons the best things. Here are two very different spectacles: Jesus, always busy in instructing men, in doing them good, and in sanctifying the feasts by good works; and the scribes and Pharisees, always watchful to oppose the good he does, to seek an accusation against him, and to dishonour God the more on those very days which were dedicated to his honour. It is the heart which makes all the difference; it is in the regulation of this, that we must employ our chief care, if we would not imitate the scribes and Pharisees.

“8. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose, and stood forth.”

What pleasure would a revengeful person take, in being able to discover the criminal thoughts which his enemy hatches in his mind? But how very different an example does our divine Pattern give us on this occasion! Docility and obedience are the first dispositions of a sinner, who desires to be cured. It is to the church, which has the ministry of spiritual healing, that we must be obedient; it is to her that we must discover our disease.

“9. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath-days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?”

Days dedicated to the worship of God, and to the commemoration of his benefits, cannot possibly be hallowed better, than by performing all sorts of good works, and abstaining from all such as are evil. By a wise and charitable question, Jesus confounds these obstinate sinners, without discovering the bad disposition of their heart: how much rather ought we to conceal that of the weak, and to spare their reputation, modesty, and infirmity, before men? Christ does not content himself with confounding his adversaries in secret; but he instructs them with humility, and edifies them.

“10. And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other.”

The envy of some enemies ought not to hinder us

from doing good. This steadfast and undaunted look of Christ teaches his ministers, not to be at all terrified by the ill will of the adversaries of goodness and truth. Those, whom fear renders weak and cowardly in the exercise of their ministry, forget that they exercise it in the name and place of Christ, and that they must give account to him of their unfaithfulness, and of the damage which the church shall have suffered thereby in her children.

“ 11. And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.”

It is not a thing so uncommon as we imagine, to see envy so furiously incensed against charity, and against such evident proofs of truth and innocence. Pride, obstinacy, and interest, combined together, are capable of any thing. When men have once framed their conscience according to their passions, madness passes for zeal, the blackest conspiracies for pious designs, and the most horrid attempts for heroic actions.

SECT. II.—*Christ Prays, and Calls the Twelve Apostles.*

“ 12. ¶ And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”

In every condition of life, we have sufficient occasion to imitate that which Christ here does, who prepares himself for the functions of his priesthood, and for the performance of good works, by retirement, watchfulness, and prayer. Prayer, which Christ, and after his example, his church, makes

use of, before choosing apostles, bishops, and other ministers, shows plainly, that in this choice we must depend upon God. They are the officers of his household, and it is highly just and reasonable, that he should be the Master of it, and that none should be placed therein but by his own hand. It is a visible encroachment upon his rights, not to consult him at all in this choice: but it is no other than to mock him, for men to consult him, when they either have determined within themselves, upon reasons altogether human, or are resolved to choose according to their own fancy.

“ 13. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named Apostles:”

Jesus prays as man, but chooses as God, and as sovereign Priest in the name of God. He consults neither those he chooses, nor those from among whom he chooses them; but without any human respect whatever executes his Father’s will. Mission is so essentially necessary to a man’s having authority in the church, that Christ would have his first ministers bear the name of apostles or envoys, to the end their mission might be as well known as their very name; and that all the world might be convinced, that there is no true mission in the church besides that which resides in their successors, which is communicated by them; and which, through them, runs back even to the apostles, and to Christ himself, by an uninterrupted succession.

“ 14. Simon (whom he also named Peter), and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew,”

This change of St. Peter's name is a mark of distinction for him, and an important instruction for us. He who enters into the ecclesiastical ministry, ought to be, as it were, changed into another man; no longer to know the world, nor to be known by it; to have, if possible, no human weakness, but the firmness of a stone or rock; to be no longer solicitous about his family, but entirely dedicated to the church; to be no more affected with human hopes or fears, but to be insensible to all false enjoyments, and always ready to be buried quick, like an apostolical stone, cast into the foundation, to support the fabric of the church.

" 15. Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alpheus, and Simon called Zelotes, 16. And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor."

Who can glory in dignities, when he considers that the worst man in the world was advanced to the apostleship? That person strangely deceives himself, who relies upon the marks of a lawful call to the priesthood, to benefices and dignities, without endeavouring to answer it by his life and ecclesiastical labours. Never was there a call more lawful or more canonical than that of Judas; never was there seen a more wicked minister. A foundation without a building is useless; a building without a foundation is ruinous. An apostolical life, founded upon an apostolical call, is the glory of Jesus Christ, the edification of his church, the salvation of the minister, and the honour of the ministry.

" 17. ¶ And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a

great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; 18. And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed."

We see here a representation of the church sojourning on earth under the conduct of the pastors. All their functions are reduced to two, which are—to instruct by the ministry of the word, and to heal by the sacraments; and all the duties of the faithful come within the same compass, namely, To hear the word of God, and to use their utmost endeavours to be healed of their passions and their sins. Faith is not wanting to those who follow Christ and his ministers with so much zeal and fervour; nor prayer, among so many poor and miserable persons. The whole life of a Christian consists almost entirely in contemplating Christ in his gospel, in order to imitate him, and in praying to obtain the grace to do it. Christ and his apostles come down towards the people, in condescending to their weakness, in compassionating their infirmities, and in labouring to heal them of their diseases. Unhappy is that pastor who does not imitate them herein !

" 19. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."

Christ is full of grace and holiness, that he may replenish souls therewith; and it is by prayer that we approach him, in order to receive of his fulness. Though, by his ascension, he be removed at a vast distance from the earth, and be also invisible in the holy sacrament, yet his virtue is neither less present,

nor less active, powerful, and efficacious in the cure of our hearts. Let us admire, how he never lets any opportunity pass of inspiring into us, by healing the body, a trust and confidence in his sovereign power as to the cure of our soul. Let us often, by faith, as it were, touch Jesus Christ, now residing in heaven; let us often with faith approach Christ; and his virtue will heal us all.

SECT. III.—*The Sermon on the Mount. The Poor blessed. The Rich cursed. False Prophets.*

“ 20. ¶ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.”

The love of riches and the love of God are incompatible in one and the same heart. Happy then is he, who is not rich in these false goods! in the want of which it is much easier for a man to live contented, than not to set his affections upon them when he has them. What is it to set our affections upon these things, but to make ourselves slaves to them, to be absolutely governed by them, and to have them for our king? And God cannot reign in a heart, unless he reign there alone. Blessed is that man, who, having his heart void of all care about riches, lives on the expectation of eternal wealth, possesses heaven already by hope, and secures the right he has in the kingdom of God, and in God himself, as being his child and heir, by relinquishing all pretensions which he may have to earthly possessions as a child of Adam!

“ 21. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.”

There must be abundance of faith to carry apostolical poverty so far, as even to want necessaries, and to suffer hunger. God permitted St. Paul to suffer it, while Nero, and other monsters like him, lived in the midst of plenty and delights. Let us by no means condemn his Providence; but adore the wisdom of his conduct, the holiness of his ways, and the power of his grace. How glorious is it to God, to make himself beloved by men at the expense of all things, without the allurement of any sensible good whatever, and purely for his own sake! This is a proof of his existence, a mark of his greatness, of the truth of his religion, and of the power of his grace, and of the triumph of his faith. A moment of hunger here, in order to be filled with God himself to all eternity!—is not that too little for so immense a happiness?

“ — Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.”

We are at first born to weep, because we are born sinners: we are born again to laugh, because we are then born children of God, and of the resurrection of Christ, and joint heirs of his eternal joy. Let us in this life submit ourselves to the penance of the children of Adam, if we would eternally enjoy the inheritance of the children of God. This is the order appointed by God; and woe be to him who would establish a different one for himself, by placing joy in this world, and tears in the other: the alternative is necessary and unavoidable. Blessed is that person who makes the necessary tears of this life a voluntary sacrifice, the object of his desires, and a subject of joy, by considering and reflecting upon them in Christ, and uniting them to his.

“ 22. Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.”

God would have such disciples and ministers as are not at all fond, either of the friendship of men, or of the comfort of society, or of the conveniences of life, or of the favours of the great, or of their own reputation ; but who are disposed to embrace the directly contrary. Men are but too happy when they are exposed to the hatred of the world, and to all the consequences of it, for the cause of Christ ; but then, they must make this cause their sole business and concern : which is a thing not very common. Where wilt thou find such persons, O Lord, if thou dost not form them thyself by thy all-powerful grace !

“ 23. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy ; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven : for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.”

The belief of heavenly enjoyments is a very great treasure, which causes men to receive even with joy the greatest evils of this life. He is not in the least worthy of the cross of Christ who bears it with regret ; and he knows not the value of it, who feels not on this account a true joy at the bottom of his heart. Would not one be apt to say, that the disciples and ministers of Christ are scarce paid with any thing but promises for all which they do and suffer for his sake ? But these promises are ready money to every one who has faith.

“ 24. But woe unto you that are rich ! for ye have received your consolation.”

Can a man read these words with faith, and yet

love riches ; or is it not rather a sign that he has but little faith, and that this little is very weak ? This is a terrible sentence against those who receive their whole joy and consolation from riches ; a wholesome admonition for those who are continually in danger of setting their affections too much upon them, and a comfort to those who make them instrumental to the support and comfort of the poor. Lord, there must be a miracle of thy hand to hinder man from pronouncing a woe against poverty, whilst thou thyself utterest this denunciation, “ Woe unto you that are rich !”

“ 25. Woe unto you that are full ! for ye shall hunger.”

If Christ says, “ Woe unto those that are full,” what will he say to those whose daily meals are great feasts, who, as it were, make profession of a life of good cheer and sensuality, who deny their taste and appetite nothing ? If to be always at a plentiful table be not indeed a sin, it is, at least, a misfortune to be always exposed to a temptation, and to the occasion of being full, and something more. The hunger and thirst of a wicked rich man will not always be of one and the same kind. Their hunger after God, or rather their rage, in eternally perceiving within themselves a natural motion towards the supreme and sovereign good, from which they will find themselves eternally rejected and repelled. This will be the most grievous hunger of the damned.

“ — Woe unto you that laugh now ! for ye shall mourn and weep.”

A life which consists altogether of joy and diversion is the life of a reprobate. Is it not to insult

justice, for a criminal to turn his prison into a scene of delights, and lead the life of a Sardanapalus, whilst, at the same time, the sentence of his condemnation is preparing. A man who hurts and wrongs nobody, and lives in a constant succession of pleasures, passes his life innocently, according to the notion of abundance of people ; but is this the notion which is here given us by Christ ? They will certainly perceive the contrary, but they will perceive it too late, in that day of mourning and weeping which shall never have an end !

“ 26. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you ! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”

A man might free himself from this enchantment of riches, good cheer, and pleasures, did not flattery, as it were, shut the gate against his return. It is a very great misfortune for the rich and great to be exposed thereto : but it is a much greater for false prophets, teachers, and spiritual directors to be praised and honoured by the world ; for it is a sign that the world is pleased with them ; and a man cannot please the world, but at the expense of Christ and the gospel. A commerce of flattery betwixt the great and their spiritual directors, is a source of infinite evils and misfortunes. When they come to settle the account, the gain on both sides will be hell and eternal damnation.

SECT. IV.—*The Love of Enemies. Patience. We must lend, hoping for nothing again.*

27. ¶ But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.”

Let us love our enemies in heart, in word, and in deed : this is the perfection of the new law, and the lesson which we learn of Christ, when we hear him as we ought. The true proof of the love of enemies is, 1st, To wish; 2d, To do them good ; 3d, To speak well of them ; and 4th, To procure them all the good we can. The gospel retaliation, the revenge of those who hearken not to their passion, but to Christ, consists in doing more good than they receive evil. “Love” not their errors, their defects, or their wicked behaviour, but their persons. “Do good to them,” not such good as may make them worse, be prejudicial to their salvation, and confirm them in evil, but which may be instrumental to their conversion. “Bless them,” not in speaking to them with a flattering and mean-spirited gentleness, which will only make them more insolent, but after such a manner as savours neither of bitterness nor revenge. “Pray for them,” not in order to obtain for them temporal prosperity, but only such things as are necessary for this life and the other.

“ 29. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other ; and him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also.”

The 5th proof of the love of enemies, is the being disposed to suffer from them affronts, contempt, and ill treatment. The 6th, to suffer even more at their hands. The 7th, to relinquish our goods, rather than to lose our meekness and charity towards them. Ever since our blessed Saviour suffered his enemies to take away his life, it is by his patience that we must regulate our own. Let us leave the use of our Creator’s permission to the Jews and to

the imperfect ; the example and the gospel of our Redeemer are the perfection of the law, and the true pattern of Christians.

“ 30. Give to every man that asketh of thee ; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.”

Self-love understands not this language, but faith and charity do. We may lawfully give alms with choice, but not with respect of persons, or by an arbitrary and groundless preference. He who expects an inheritance in heaven, is but little concerned about his earthly goods. Christ does not condemn either laws or the use of them ; he only delivers one which is more perfect. This, indeed, appears no other than a folly to carnal men ; but we must follow Christ in the foolishness of his morality, as well as in that of his cross. The power of God, and the salvation of men, are affixed to the one as well as to the other.

“ 31. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”

How bright and clear is this rule of equity towards our neighbour ; and how many cases of conscience would it decide, if it were sincerely consulted on all occasions. Our self-love blinds us, and renders us unjust to our neighbour ; and it is this very self-love which must serve to enlighten and set us right, in respect of that which is owing to him. By changing persons, and putting ourselves in his place, and him in our own, we shall more easily discover our injustice and our duty. It is only by thy grace, O Jesus, that we can attain to a practical and saving knowledge in this matter.

“ 32. For if ye love them which love you, what

thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them."

It is the property of the Christian religion, and which shows that that alone is the true, not only to make known the corruption of nature, to correct its errors, and reform its disorders; but even to raise it above itself, to bring it near to God, and, by a universal charity, to frame its conduct according to that of the Sovereign Being; while the sages of false religions, like people of a bad life, love those only who love them.

" 33. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same."

A man ought to tremble with fear, if, besides the external part of religion, he finds nothing in life but what may be found in a Turk or a heathen. Those who signalize themselves by great acts of liberality, make no other discovery, but only that they are entirely influenced by self-love, if, while they load those with favours who love or flatter them, they do nothing but mischief to such as oppose them, and no manner of good to those who are indifferent to them.

" 34. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again."

To make our neighbour purchase the assistance which we give him, is to profit by his misery, and to increase it, under pretence of alleviating it. In vain do we flatter ourselves that we have a Christian heart, if we love not our brother after a Christian manner: we do not love him after a Christian manner, when we do not love him for God's sake; and we love him

not for God's sake, when we seek somewhat else besides God in doing him good.

"35. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."

Observe here the tenderness, sincerity, extent, disinterestedness, pattern, and reward of Christian charity. A religion, which has for its foundation the union of God with man in the same person, and the death of this God-man for his enemies; which consists, on earth, in the reconciliation of the Creator with his creatures, by a mercy pure and unmixed, and a grace altogether free; and which is to subsist, in heaven, only in the union of the members with their head, consummated in the unity of God: could such a religion as this in the least approve of the hatred of enemies? In necessity, every thing ought to be in common betwixt those who possess Christ in common upon earth, and who are to possess God as their joint inheritance in heaven.

"36. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

Man in the state of innocence, made in the image and after the likeness of his Creator, ought to have borne the image of his majesty upon earth, by his dominion over himself and over all creatures. Man fallen from innocence, and become altogether animal and like the beasts themselves by his sinful birth, bears every where the image of his own misery. Man become Christian, who is the work of the divine mercy, ought continually to bear the image, and, as

one may say, to wear the badge of this perfection, there being scarce any other in God which he has now to imitate. Thou art, O my God, all mercy towards me; grant that I may be all mercy towards my brethren, for thy sake.

SECT. V.—*Not to judge. The Blind leaders of the Blind. The Mote and Beam in the Eye.*

“ 37. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged :”

There are four kinds of mercy to be exercised. The first consists in not judging of secret intentions, when they do not appear by the actions ; in renouncing that inquisitive, rash, and malicious desire, which puts us upon searching into the heart. In vain do we flatter ourselves with being innocent, in not openly declaring the disadvantageous judgment which we form inwardly concerning our neighbour. The pleasure which we take in lessening him in our own minds, out of envy or vanity, does not, by being secret, cease to be criminal. How great is the goodness of God, in being so willing to put our judgments into our own hands, as to engage himself not to enter into judgment with us, provided we do not usurp the right, which belongs solely to him, of judging the heart.

“ — Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned :”

The second sort of mercy inclines us, not to condemn those rigidly and unmercifully whose faults are certain and visible ; to lessen, conceal, and excuse them as much as we can, without prejudice to truth and justice ; and to be far from aggravating or divulging them, or desiring the punishment of them. It is no other than the blindness of a madman, to ex-

pose himself to the rigour and severity of the divine vengeance, rather than to show some indulgence and tenderness towards his own brother.

“ — Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:”

The third kind of mercy extends to the forgiving the injuries we have received. To imitate herein the mercy of God, is not a bare counsel, since it is proposed as a necessary means in order to receive mercy. That which man has to pardon in man is almost a mere nothing; that which he owes to God is an infinite debt: and yet he cannot resolve to embrace so advantageous an exchange! But in the passion of revenge there is neither faith nor reason.

“ 38. Give, and it shall be given unto you ; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.”

The fourth sort of mercy requires us to give or lend to others in necessity. Charity ought to make no difficulty of giving that which truth promises to restore. It is not sufficient for Christian charity, either not to exact rigorously what is our due, or not to insist upon satisfaction for injuries; but we must give of our own to those who have need of it. Let us give, neither out of a mere human generosity, nor out of vanity nor interest; but for the sake of God, if we would have him place it to account. There is no such thing as true generosity but only in God, because there is none but he who receives no advantage from his gifts, and because he engages himself, even to pay the debts of his creatures with an excessive interest. Since he promises to do this, it is

piety in us to hope for and expect it. So great is the goodness of God, that when he might have absolutely commanded us to give to our neighbour, he vouch-safes to invite us to this duty by the prospect of a reward, and to impute that to us as desert, which he has a right to exact of us, by the title of his sovereignty over our persons and estates.

“ 39. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind ? shall they not both fall into the ditch ?”

A man has no love for his own soul who puts it under the direction of a blind person. One cannot possibly have a guide too clear-sighted amongst all the temptations and dangers of this life. It is a very great misfortune to fall by chance into the hands of a blind guide ; but to seek after such a one, and to be afraid of finding one who is too clear-sighted, is such a folly as could never be imagined, were it not so very common. It belongs to thee, O Lord, to send these guides, to form and instruct them, and to be thyself the Guide of these very guides of thy elect, and to cause them to be earnestly prayed for, and chosen as they ought.

“ 40. The disciple is not above his master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.”

A blind guide, an ignorant director, a pastor who knows not the ways of the gospel, what can they do but ruin all, both in souls and in the church ? It is the ignorance of pastors which is the occasion of the ignorance relating to the true worship of God, of superstitious practices, abuses, disorders, &c. Ignorance is a greater scourge to the church than vice, because it is more capable of destroying its founda-

tion, which is faith, and because it has a greater train of ill consequences.

“ 41. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye ?”

Ignorance is, as it were, a beam in the eyes of those who should enlighten others. They are generally not at all sensible, either of this ignorance, or of the evils which it causes in the church. One very dangerous effect of ignorance is, that it raises great disputes in the church, when, either through ignorance or passion, (which is another beam which blinds even more than ignorance;) men blame in a doctrine (which is the eye of a minister of Christ) that which is not blameable ; and when they take error for truth, and truth for error. He who thoroughly examines himself, is not very ready to find fault with others.

“ 42. Either, how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye ? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye.”

It is a strange folly, that men will not endeavour to instruct and heal themselves, before they undertake to instruct and heal others. It is no other than a continual state of hypocrisy, for a man to take upon him a ministry which consists in directing and instructing souls, and to make a show of exercising these functions, when he is altogether unable to perform them, by reason of his ignorance, his want of

application, and perhaps his incapacity to learn the several duties of his station. More miserable still is he, who, to these imperfections, adds likewise open and apparent vices, which scandalize the church, instead of edifying it. There is no other remedy for such ministers, but to retire, in order to cast this beam out of their eye, by repentance and the study of the Scriptures, and to leave to others the care of pulling the mote out of the eyes of their brethren.

SECT. VI.—*The Fruit like the Tree. The good and evil Treasure. Lord, Lord. The House built on the Sand.*

“ 43. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”

We have a right to judge of the tree when its fruit appears, and of a spiritual director when his life and actions speak. Actions apparently disorderly, seducing words, and maxims contrary to the common faith of the whole church, are plain marks that the beam is in the eye, and that it is not safe to follow such a guide. Too great a reservedness, fear of judging rashly, and a blind submission to the judgment and conduct of a director, are no better than temptations of the devil, and an illusion, when God permits the veil of hypocrisy to be taken off, and covetousness to spread and manifest itself abroad. On the other side, it is great injustice, and an intolerable rashness, to judge ill of those in whom nothing but goodness appears, and to decry such pastors and directors, whose fruits testify that they are good trees, planted by God in his church for the nourishment and shelter of his elect.

“ 44. For every tree is known by his own fruit : for of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes.”

We may judge of the heart by the works. The fruits of a carnal heart are, uncleanness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, envyings, revellings, &c. Gal. v. 19—21. The fruits of a spiritual heart are love, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, &c. ver. 22, 23. Good fruits do not consist in fine discourses, nor in some remarkable actions, but in the whole tenor of the life and conversation, when it diffuses the sweet odour of Christ’s life, and makes known the power of his Spirit. In times of seducement, we ought earnestly to beg of God a discerning spirit, attention, prudence, fidelity, knowledge, &c. and, above all, purity of heart, which is necessary in order to know God and the men of God, and to distinguish that which proceeds from his Spirit.

“ 45. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good ; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil : for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”

Charity is the source of all good, concupiscence the origin of all evil. A good heart always makes itself known by the good which proceeds from it, what holy artifice soever humility may use in order to hide it; all the actions of the life still savouring of the principle which produces them, and of the end to which they are directed. The corrupt heart, for the same reason, cannot always lie concealed, what precaution soever hypocrisy takes to that purpose; because one passion betrays another.

Nothing can suppress the voice of works which are the tongue of the heart.

“ 46. ¶ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

God judges of the heart, not by words, but by works. He only mocks God, who calls him Lord, and does not obey his commandments. A good servant never disputes, speaks little, and always follows his work. Such a servant a good Christian is; such is a faithful minister—always intent either on the work of his own salvation, or on that of his neighbour; speaking more to God than to men, and to these as in the presence of God; and following the light of his law, without pretending to make himself the judge of it by human reasonings. The tongue is, as it were, a pump, which empties the heart, but neither cleanses nor fills it. The love of God is a hidden spring, which supplies the heart continually, never leaves it dry, and always fills it afresh, by means of good works, and fidelity in doing the will of God.

“ 47. Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like:”

Important words, which give us a lively picture of a true Christian. Since it is Christ himself who promises to draw it, he well deserves our whole attention. We desire extremely to know, what an elect or a reprobate is: let us learn it from the mouth of him, who makes the elect what they are, but produces not the least part of that in reprobates which renders them such. He who comes to Christ by faith, who reads, hears, and meditates on his word with faith, and by persevering in the practice of his

gospel lives thus by faith ; this person is an elect of God. He who persists in doing the contrary, is a reprobate.

“ 48. He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock : and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it ; for it was founded upon a rock.”

There is no solid piety but in the practice of the gospel. Works are the seal of faith. Let men make as many comments as they please upon the gospel, let them exhaust their invention in framing nice distinctions, to excuse themselves with some sort of probability from the practice of it, all this is but sand, which the flood of God’s wrath will wash away, so long as the firm rock of the gospel is not the foundation and rule of their life.

“ 49. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that, without a foundation, built an house upon the earth ; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell ; and the ruin of that house was great.”

All consists in doing good. In vain does a man flatter himself with being of the number, if he does not lead the life, of the predestinate ; and this life consists not in an external forwardness to hear the word, but in an inward fidelity in the practice of it. It is neither by the speculations of astrologers, nor by the Calvinian assurance of predestination, that we can discover what will be our portion for ever : but it is by the examination of our heart, and the consideration of our life, that we may in some measure prognosticate our eternal state. Without the sup-

port of good works, all is ruinous, both at the hour of temptation, and in the day of wrath.

CHAPTER VII.

SECT. I.—*The Centurion.*

“ 1. Now, when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.”

A good pastor, of whom Christ is the model, proceeds continually from instruction to action, and from action to instruction. Words speak only to the understanding, works speak to the heart.

“ 2. And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.”

In sickness and necessity masters ought to act like fathers toward their servants. That which heathens can do upon mere human motives of compassion, honour, interest, or friendship, a Christian master ought to perform upon Christian motives, having respect to Christ in the person of his servant. Death may perhaps in a very little time make the master and the servant equal; and God may place the servant above the master. We must by charity anticipate this equality; and honour beforehand this superiority, by the spirit of humility.

“ 3. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.”

It is a good presage and a favourable omen, that a man will obtain the favour which he asks, when he does not think himself worthy to obtain it by himself.

He has already obtained something better than what he desires, in having received sufficient light to know himself, and humility not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

“ 4. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: 5. For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.”

The centurion is praised by men upon the account only of his external works, which interest caused them chiefly to consider. Christ reserves to himself the commanding of his heart, and the discovering to us the riches of it.

“ 6. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:”

It is unprofitable for a man to receive the sacramental representation of Christ, if he does not receive him into his heart, as the centurion did. Let us, after his example, endeavour earnestly to attract him into ours, by a prayer full of faith, humility, simplicity, and confidence. It is this which draws Christ into the house of this pious Gentile, whilst he seems to go thither, as following the Jews, and only upon their recommendation. Thus it very often happens, that the blessing which God sheds upon a family, a parish, a community, or a church, is occasioned by some devout soul, whose heart is known only to God; though men may attribute it all to others.

“ 7. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.”

We can no way render ourselves worthy of Jesus Christ and his grace, but by acknowledging ourselves unworthy of them. The just idea which the centurion has of the almighty power of God, and of Christ, in healing bodies by the sole motion of his will, is the pattern of that which we ought to frame, concerning the almighty power of his grace, in healing souls of concupiscence. He does what he pleases with the heart, as well as with the body; being equally the creator of both. It is Christ himself, who, in the cure of the paralytic, teaches us to judge thus of the one by the other.

“ 8. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.”

The pride of the synagogue, which attributed all to the merit and virtue of the works of the law, is figured by the Jews, the friends of the centurion: the faith of the church, which ascribes all to the pure mercy of God, and to the almighty operation of his will upon ours, is represented by the faith of the centurion, who is the first-fruits of the Gentiles. He shall rise up in judgment at the last day against those, who, after the experience of so many ages, and the instructions of so many saints and doctors, dare yet dispute with God his omnipotent power over the heart of man.

“ 9. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”

Christ praises the virtue of men boldly and plainly,

because he praises his own gifts in them, and gives them the grace not to grow vain upon them. The preference of the Gentiles before the Jews, is here lightly intimated by Christ, as founded upon the too mean idea which the Jews had of his grace. Our blessed Lord's sincerity is equal, both when he praises, and when he blames: but he blames the Jews when they are present, and praises the centurion only in his absence; because he does not praise him for his own sake, but for the benefit and advantage of others.

“ 10. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.”

This cure is the reward and effect of faith, prayer, and humility; the goodness of God towards men being so great, that he is pleased that the very virtues and graces which he confers upon them, should be counted unto them instead of merit. It is God himself, who by the gifts of his mercy disposes and prepares the sinner for his cure; and nothing can contribute to the reception of his grace, but what is the effect of his grace itself.

SECT. II.—*The Widow of Nain.*

“ 11. ¶ And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. 12. Now, when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.”

This dead man of Nain is the emblem of a sinner dead in sin. Happy the sinner, when mercy comes to meet him, at least before he is buried in his evil ha-

bits, and has filled up the measure of his sins ; after which he is, as it were, buried in oblivion before God ! Let us admire this meeting of Christ and the sinner, of life and death ; a meeting accidental in appearance, but appointed in the eternal order of the divine predestination. The church, whom Christ at his ascension left a widow, bewails the spiritual death of every one of her children, as that of an only son ; since the whole body may be considered as comprised in some manner under every one of its members. It is almost the whole employment of this widow to follow sinners, and in this life to lament their death, until they have all either found Jesus Christ, or, by being buried, have lost all hopes of finding him. Let us bear her company, by joining our tears and prayers to hers in behalf of sinners.

“ 13. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.”

Christ is moved only by the tears of his church, that is, by the repentance which is performed in her bosom by his Spirit. He hearkens only to her charity, which is continually intent on the salvation of her children, whom she every day brings forth anew to life. He regards only her prayers for the conversion of those sinners for whom she prays, whilst they do not pray at all for themselves. Happy is that person who is in the bosom of this mother, and for whom she prays continually ! Happy will this mother, at present disconsolate, be, when her Lord going forth to meet her, and she him, he shall say to her, “ Weep not ;” because there will then be no longer any occasion to weep, after the sanctification of all the elect. Nothing comforts her in her widow-

hood but the conversion of sinners, and the hopes of seeing all tears one day wiped from her eyes.

“ 14. And he came and touched the bier : and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.”

It is a very great mercy that God does not abandon us under the death of sin, but vouchsafes to come to meet us. Whenever he strikes a sinner’s body with some disease, his senses with some objects, and his ears with some words, which, by the means of his grace, prove instrumental to his conversion, he may then be said to touch the living coffin of a dead soul. Men are not sensible that these strokes proceed from a hand of grace and mercy, while they are yet under the death of sin ; and they very frequently never reflect upon them, even when they are risen again. What acknowledgment is not due to God, from a young man, who is carried out by his passions to the grave of a sinful habit, wherein he would be buried for ever ; but grace stops them betimes, raises him again, and gives him a new life !

“ 15. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.”

He whom God teaches effectually, 1. Rises or sits up, by forsaking his sins ; 2. Begins to speak, in confessing them ; 3. Puts himself into the hands of his mother, in submitting himself to the power and discipline of the church, resigning himself up to the conduct of her ministers, and living by her spirit. When Christ delivers us into the hands of our mother, he does not thereby leave us, because she herself is in the hands of her Lord. Since the sinner is restored to the church, it is plain that he had

been torn from her, that he was no longer a living member of this body of Christ, and that he was joined to it only by a dead faith. Happy the sinner, who is restored to it for ever, to live to all eternity in this immortal body of the only Son of God.

“ 16. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.”

The conversion of sinners is an undoubted proof of the incarnation of the Son of God, which is the great visit he has made to his people. Were but the eyes of our faith quick and clear-sighted, what effects would not those wonderful conversions produce in us, which are frequently the subject of the world’s raillery? So great is the blindness under which it lies, that a sinner is often frightened at such conversions, and is really afraid, lest the grace and mercy of God should come and snatch him away from his pleasures, and the other objects of his passions. We glorify thee, O Lord, for all thy mercies towards sinners, and we desire and implore them for ourselves. The common people readily acknowledge, that miracles are the necessary proof of an extraordinary mission in the church; and learned men, puffed up with pride, refuse to acknowledge the necessity thereof, and choose rather to deliver themselves up to seducers.

“ 17. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about.”

God changes offence or scandal into edification, by the conversion of sinners. Even an outward change of life, is a thing scarce ever heard of out of

the true church. She alone has this privilege, because she only has the Holy Ghost, who alone can change the heart. Let us inviolably adhere to this house of mercy.

SECT. III.—*St. John's Disciples sent to Christ.*
The Praises of St. John.

“ 18. ¶ And the disciples of John showed him of all these things.”

John’s humility and charity, by a holy kind of address, turn that to the advantage of his Master, which, perhaps, the emulation of these disciples caused them to look upon with an evil eye. He who is ambitious of having the pre-eminence, knows how to set his own advantages in the best light, and to expose the infirmities of others. John takes the time when Christ appears with the greatest lustre, and he himself is under the lowest state of humiliation, to undeceive his disciples. Curiosity, perhaps, as well as jealousy, causes these disciples to talk of the news of what passes in the world: John takes from hence an occasion to instruct them. It is thus that we may make a good use of worldly news, when we are either in such circumstances that we cannot well be acquainted with it, or have not virtue enough to live without it.

“ 19. And John calling unto him two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?”

He who is only to conduct souls to Christ, ought to send all his disciples to Him, and not retain them in attendance upon himself. That man does enough for the souls under his care, who puts them in the

way of addressing themselves to God and Christ as they ought, and of being attentive to his word and inspirations, to the voice of faith and to his miracles, and to the instructions, mysteries, and conduct of his life. John shows us, that all the science taught in his school, consisted only in disposing men to expect the deliverer. Lord, we expect and look for no other ; but we expect thee in another state and condition. They expected thee as the Author of faith and righteousness ; but we expect thee as He who is to be the Finisher and Crown thereof.

“ 20. When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come ? or look we for another ?”

How commendable is this simplicity and fidelity of these disciples, in doing and saying nothing but what was prescribed to them ! It is by the way of the obedience of faith that we must go to Christ, that we must speak to him, hear him, and contemplate his wonders. They ask but one thing, because that comprehends all. It is sufficient to be once assured that it is Christ who speaks to us, that it is our Redeemer who promises us his grace, and draws us after him.

“ 21. And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits ; and unto many that were blind he gave sight.”

The language of a Christian is, to do the works of a sick man healed, and of a slave set at liberty ; as that of Jesus Christ is, to perform those of a sovereign physician, and of an almighty deliverer. Lord, we know thee by this language. It is thou who

must cure our infirmities and diseases, and close the wounds of our hearts. It is thou who comest to deliver us from our darkness and blindness, and from all the remains of the evil spirit's dominion within us. Perform thy work in us, O Jesus ; for nothing can hinder thee from accomplishing thy will, and working our salvation.

“ 22. Then Jesus, answering, said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard ; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.”

The mission of Jesus Christ is extraordinary, and therefore he proves it by his miracles. He works them upon the soul, as well as the body, 1. Enlightening the understanding. 2. Rectifying the will. 3. Blotting out sins. 4. Making himself heard by the ears of the heart. 5. Converting even the most hardened sinners, and restoring to them the life of the soul. And, 6. Teaching his ways to the humble. We must be of the number of these poor, if we desire to have any part in the riches of faith, and of the true knowledge of the gospel. Grant us, Lord, this poverty of spirit, which gives a right to the treasure of the divine truths. Disperse the false glimmerings of human wisdom, to make way for the light of thy Holy Spirit !

“ 23. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

How corrupt is man, since he takes occasion of scandal or offence from the best things, and even from Christ himself ! The sinner would willingly have such a Saviour as should comply with human

passions; and would fain go to God by ways conformable to those of the world: he finds the directly contrary in Christ and his gospel, and this is what offends, and keeps him at a distance from them. Religion is contrived after such a manner, that every thing therein tends to make God known to the children of faith, to edify them, and unite them to Jesus Christ; and, at the same time, to offend, discourage, and keep off the wise, and the lovers of the world, and to hide the truth, and even God himself, from such as have no other eyes but those of flesh and human reason. A God concealed and hid in the flesh, in infancy, humiliations, sufferings, &c. this is what exercises and nourishes the faith, and inflames the charity of the former, but increases the infidelity, and disgusts the pride of the latter.

“ 24. ¶ And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?”

The humility of John renders him immoveable. Whoever has not this virtue, is a reed shaken with the wind.

“ 25. But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts.”

The world is the seat of excess, sensual delights, and impenitence, and of all things which are opposite to Christianity. Happy is he who lives at a distance from it! It is not absolutely impossible to be saved therein, because with God all things are possible, but it is extremely dangerous, and very

toilsome, to have the work of our salvation to do in a place where every thing is contrary thereto. Solitude and the court are set in opposition the one to the other by Jesus Christ. In the former, piety and repentance take refuge, to be secure from the wickedness of the world : to the latter resort luxury and pleasure, in order to reign there without control.

“ 26. But what went ye out for to see ? A prophet ? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. 27. This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger* before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” [** Fr. Angel.*]

It is a very great sight, and most worthy of the holy curiosity of a Christian, to see a religious man disengaged from all earthly things, and devoted entirely to God and Christ. In this short description which Christ here gives of John, he draws the character of a holy pastor, and of a perfect director of souls. 1. He must, like a prophet, be illuminated of God, replenished with his word, and instructed in his ways, and in the methods of his conduct. 2. He must be more than a prophet, and have somewhat more than light and knowledge in his mind. He ought to have so lively a faith, as not to see Jesus Christ only at a distance, but, as it were, even to touch him, to breathe nothing but him, to be an image of him in his whole life, and, like John, to represent him in all his actions. 3. He must have all the qualities which the Scripture requires in a pastor, insomuch that it may seem to have spoken of him. 4. He must be sent by a lawful call and mission. 5. He must be, as it were, an angel, having no interest on earth but that of the church, stooping

even down to the earth by his humility and zeal in the service of souls, and ascending up to heaven by his prayers, and his love of heavenly things. 6. He ought to have no other business than to prepare the way for Jesus Christ in souls, and to count all things else as nothing. 7. He must learn, even from his function itself, that souls are to be conducted to Christ by degrees, and that this is not the business of a moment; that he is to instruct them by the word, to cleanse them by repentance, and to keep them in the way, before he admits them to the enjoyment of Christ in the communion, which is only for those who are well prepared.

“ 28. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

There is a very great difference betwixt the saints of this life and those of the other: a greater still betwixt such as have only gifts profitable to others, namely, gifts of prophecy, of preaching, or of directing souls; and those who are united to God by his love, in whom his grace reigns, and who are rich in Christian virtues. True greatness consists in God’s living and reigning in us, and in our being obedient to his will, and our relying upon his Spirit. That which proceeds from external gifts, and such as do not sanctify of themselves, is dangerous; and to desire them, is pride and presumption.

“ 29. And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.”

How happy is a man, when he knows how to value

as he ought the grace of repentance, and to improve the time of mercy ! It is by repentance, that the designs of God are accomplished, and that he is most glorified ; because nothing more fully displays his goodness in giving up his own interests, his wisdom in bringing good out of sin itself, which is the greatest evil, and his almighty power in changing the heart at his pleasure, and causing man to love and embrace that which is most contrary to his inclinations. It is by the works of a true conversion, and not by bare words, that men express a sincere acknowledgment for the gift of repentance.

“ 30. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.”

The illiterate people, and great sinners, profit more by the word of God, than the doctors of the law, and the great pretenders to devotion. Men frequently, through a false greatness of soul, and a wicked elevation of mind, despise small things, and thereby deprive themselves of great ones which are annexed to them ; as the grace of receiving Christ was to the reception of John’s baptism, which was designed to prepare them for the other. Religion is full of these dependencies and connexions betwixt the least and the greatest things. The humble submit to them, and are saved ; the proud reject them, and are lost. God can easily make himself amends in the way of justice, and repair whatever loss his glory has sustained by the refusal of his mercy ; but nothing can repair that person’s loss who rejects repentance.

SECT. IV.—*Jesus Christ and John rejected by the Jews.*

“31. ¶ And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? 32. They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. 33. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread, nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil.”

The more God displays his goodness in opening to men several ways which lead to himself, the more he discovers the depth of those wounds which sin has made in their hearts. Charity alone can heal them: and these external means, by their being ineffectual, show plainly the necessity there is of a remedy which may reach the heart, and work powerfully therein. Obstinacy, and the spirit of contradiction, are the effect of envy and covetousness. Both Jesus Christ and John were calumniated; and who then will complain of being so? Let us not pretend to satisfy the world, since they could not do it. The outward austerity of John is the pattern of a retired life.

“34. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!”

The life of Jesus Christ, common in appearance, is an emblem of that of priests. Though we consult the fancy of the world never so much, unless we approve of its conduct, it will never approve of ours. The part we have to take is, to follow, without any

human respect whatever, that course of life which God requires of us, and to perform the duties of our state and calling, without being at all solicitous concerning the judgment of men. It is the property of a Pharisee to take offence at a physician's visiting the sick, or a pastor's seeking sinners in order to lead them to Christ: but there are measures to be observed to avoid danger, and to give our neighbour no just occasion of offence. A clergyman, who either industriously hunts after plentiful tables, or frequents them too often, cannot fail of giving it.

“35. But Wisdom is justified of all her children.”

The different ways of holy men justify the wisdom of God. It is neither austerity of life, nor liberty in the use of all things, nor poverty, nor abundance, which really distinguish the children of God from those of the world, but charity and concupiscence. The former, leads to God by all manner of ways; the latter, never finds him in any, because it corrupts all by its malignity.

SECT. V.—*The Woman anointing the Feet of Jesus.*

“36. ¶ And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. 37. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment,”

We see in this woman the emblem of a true conversion. Grace attracts the most desperate sinners, for the encouragement of such souls as are most abandoned to sin, and to teach them not to despair of salvation. The first grace is, to know that there

is a Saviour, who waits for our repentance, and came for the sake of sinners. The second is, to seek him; which is done by prayer and by the desires, which are, as it were, the feet and wings of the heart. The third is, not to delay seeking him one moment. The fourth, to find him by faith. The fifth, to speak to God and Christ at first, no other way but by the motions of the heart. And the sixth, to have an inward shame and confusion, which may make us despise all that to which we may be exposed in the sight of men.

“ 38. And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.”

The seventh grace is, to learn of this penitent, that the feet of Christ are the happy portion of a truly converted sinner. The eighth, not to be ashamed, in any place, or on any occasion, to have recourse to the mercy of God, and to weep for our sins. The ninth is, to be convinced, that as we have spared nothing in the commission of sin, so we ought to spare nothing in making satisfaction to God. The tenth is, to be moved with compassion towards the poor, who are the feet of Christ, and to let them partake of the good things we have received from God. To kiss Christ’s feet, is to serve and relieve the poor with respect and love, and with such a faith as causes us to discover and honour Jesus Christ in them. The eleventh grace is, to submit ourselves to his ministers, who are likewise his feet in another sense, because they bring peace and the grace of reconciliation to true penitents. The twelfth and last

grace is, to make that useful and serviceable to charity, which before served only to concupiscence.

“ 39. Now when the Pharisee, which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.”

It is one sign of pride to despise sinners, and to be unable to endure the goodness of God towards those whom he draws to himself. The proud person is at the same time cruel and unmerciful towards sinners, and irreligious toward God: he accuses him of not knowing sinners; and it is he himself who knows not his God, and removes still farther from him. I know thee, O Jesus, by thy love to sinners. Thou knowest them better than they know themselves. It is thou who drawest them to thyself, who inspirlest them with confidence to approach thee, and who givest them a faith full of love, whereby they touch thee, and are reconciled to thee.

“ 40. And Jesus answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.”

How lovely is this gentleness of Christ! How fine a pattern is it to imitate, when we would reclaim or instruct any one. Courteousness is so far from being contrary to holiness, that it is an effect of it. We do not become barbarians in becoming Christians. We must learn to reconcile fidelity in the performance of our duty, with that civility and obliging carriage which we owe our neighbour. We cannot possibly better requite hospitality, nor acknowledge our obligations to our neighbour in a better

manner, than by giving him the wholesome advice whereof he stands in need, and assisting him in the attainment of salvation.

“ 41. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?”

Miserable is he who loves not God, after having received from him many benefits, and the pardon of many sins! How much more does a Jew owe to God, who has wrought so many wonders for him, than a heathen, who has received nothing but the gifts of nature? But how much more, without comparison, does a Christian owe than a Jew, an orthodox person than a heretic, and a man particularly called to the service of God, than one abandoned to the torrent of the world? We always owe a vast debt to God, whether he shows his mercy either in pardoning our sins, or in preventing them.

“ 43. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.”

The greatness of God’s mercy towards us is the measure of our love towards him: but what possible return can we make for a mercy which is infinite, with a heart so small and narrow as our own? Our ignorance of what God has forgiven us, either in pardoning or preventing, and the knowledge we have of the corruption of our heart, are sufficient to convince us, that we are those to whom he has forgiven most. There are two graces which are necessary above all others to a penitent: The first, to have a sight and

sense of what he owes to God ; the second, to judge rightly of it. Grant us, Lord, a third, in enlarging our heart by a most grateful love, and such as may be, in some measure, worthy of thy mercies.

“ 44. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet : but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.”

Let us be so far from making within ourselves proud comparisons, in order to exalt ourselves above great sinners, as rather to make such as may serve to humble us, by comparing our own infidelities with the good which we see in others. God alone knows the worth of a soul in his own sight, and at what rate it ought to be valued. Men lose all by vanity, they regain all by humility ; and even the very sins of penitents may be of use to them to this purpose by the grace of Christ. It is at his feet that this miracle is wrought ; it is there that we must submit and humble whatever seems best and loftiest in ourselves.

“ 45. Thou gavest me no kiss : but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet.”

A penitent should never cease to kiss the feet of Christ by a lively faith, and to make some return for his charity, by loving him in the poor, and in the lowest members of his mystical body.

“ 46. My head with oil thou didst not anoint : but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.”

God speaks in behalf of that person who silently suffers the envy and contradiction of the world, which are one part of mortification. A deficiency in works,

is a certain proof of a defect in love. Let us pour on Jesus the oil of works of mercy in serving his members, if we desire his mercy to be poured upon ourselves. Spiritual works of mercy, in order to the salvation of the soul, which is the main business, penetrate like oil, and reach the heart: those which relate to the body, are like a perfume or fragrant ointment, which diffuses its sweet odour in the church by edification and good example.

“ 47. Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”

There is no saving mercy where there is no love of God: but great is the mercy where men love much. Nothing more inflames the heart of a penitent towards God, than the consideration of those sins from which he has washed him in the blood of his Son, and of those from which he has preserved him in changing his heart by his grace. He who thinks, that less love is due from him, because he has sinned less, little understands the nature of sin, or of that mercy which preserves us from it, or the wickedness of which, without that mercy, man is capable by reason of his corruption.

“ 48. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.”

Happy that person, to whom God speaks these words, so as to reach the bottom of his heart: for God at the same time performs what he says. These dispositions, Lord, are not less thy work, than the forgiveness of sin itself. Do thou therefore work them in our hearts. Do thou thyself dispose and prepare us for this by thy other gifts.

“ 49. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?”

Heretics say the same thing to the church, which these Jews did to her Lord, when they will not acknowledge the power he has left her to forgive sins. It is He in her, and she by Him, who absolves, as well as baptizes. He who believes the latter, ought likewise to believe the former; since it is the same person who has declared both. Let us often exercise our faith upon this comfortable truth. Let us take care, not to say within ourselves that which heretics speak aloud. Though men sit with Christ at the table of the church, they may, notwithstanding, sometimes have suggestions of infidelity: they must resist them by faith.

“ 50. And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.”

Faith produces righteousness, and righteousness gives peace. Faith is never alone in a heart; and it is very lively there, when it causes a man to seek Christ, to adhere to him, and humble himself at his feet, drawing from his eyes tears of repentance, and disposing him to give all to God, and to his neighbour for God’s sake. How solid and substantial is peace, when it is the fruit of such a repentance! A good pastor ought to nourish this peace in those who are once thoroughly converted. Confidence is always good, when it is regulated by faith.

CHAPTER VIII.

SECT. I.—*The Parable of the Sower.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God and the twelve were with him.”

The zeal, vigilance, and charity of Christ, are the pattern of a bishop in the visitation of his diocess, accompanied with his evangelical labourers, and teaching his people in person. If he cannot exactly imitate so great a simplicity, poverty, and toil, yet he ought at least to come as near them as possible, and to cut off all excess, pomp, and ostentation, and to spare others all superfluous and needless expense. Let us take great care to avoid, as much as possible, worldly equipage and retinue, while we are labouring to advance the kingdom of God: to do otherwise, is to establish that which we would destroy, and to destroy that which we would establish.

“ 2. And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, 3. And Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.”

Jesus receives these assistances and ministrations,

1. To honour poverty, by subjecting himself thereto.
2. To humble himself, in receiving from his creatures.
3. That he may depend upon the providence of his Father.
4. To make way for the gratitude and

charity of those he had healed. And, 5. That he may not be burdensome to those to whom he goes to preach. It has, in all ages, been the proper lot of pious ladies to labour in establishing the kingdom of God, by the exercise of charity towards the ministers of Christ, and towards the poor. These women carry about with them living proofs of the mission and charity of Christ, having been miraculously healed by him. In this travelling church, he gives us a representation of his church on earth, wherein the ministry of the truth and that of charity ought to be inseparable.

“ 4. ¶ And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable : ”

Men run to Christ as to a new spectacle ; and he makes use of their curiosity to draw to him his elect. He chooses out a little good ground, made such by his grace, from amidst a large quantity full of stones and thorns, exposed to birds who prey upon it, and to men who trample it under their feet. A good pastor ought to be such as Christ. He must sow the word in all places, to the end it may fall upon some, in which it will spring up, and bear eternal fruit.

“ 5. A sower went out to sow his seed : and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side ; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”

See here what a heart is, which either despises or neglects the word of God, and thereby renders ineffectual all the light, desires, and inclinations to good, which he has sown in it. This is one of the most common faults of the world, wherein the love of earthly things is, as it were, the feet which treads

down the seed ; and the love of glory as the fowls which devour it. In vain do men flatter themselves, as if they were not of the world, if they love it and seek its conversation : this is to be by the way-side, though not to be in it. Whoever loves the world, will never retain the word of God in his heart.

“ 6. And some fell upon a rock ; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.”

What man, when he considers his own hardness and insensibility, has not reason to fear that he has a heart of stone as to the things of God ? The tears of repentance are that wholesome moisture which nourishes the love of God’s word, and of the truth, and which keeps the heart from growing hard, and the seed sprung up from withering away. Lord, my heart is in thy sight like land where there is no water : let the rain of thy grace descend upon it, and cause this fountain of the tears of true repentance to spring up therein.

“ 7. And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.”

How can the love of evangelical truths possibly subsist in a heart full of the thorns of worldly lusts ? Fear lest thy own is such. How oft are we deceived in this matter, when we see the love of God’s word, good desires, and even good works, subsist for some time together with vanity, ambition, luxury, and other lusts, and even grow up together with them ! Sooner or later the thorns will choke the seed, if they be not plucked up in time.

“ 8. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred fold. And when he

had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

The fruit shows plainly whether we belong to the good ground. But let us tremble, when we see so little which is good, in comparison of the rest. All that which bears fruit does not preserve it to maturity. The wind of temptation blows down abundance of it; the worm of pride and of riches devours a great quantity; and the rottenness of unclean pleasures destroys as much. How little good grain, O Lord, is carried into thy celestial granaries! Vouchsafe to cause me to become part of thy wheat.

" 9. ¶ And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? 10. And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."

The understanding of the Scriptures and mysteries is not given to all. It must be humbly begged of Him who is the Author and sovereign Dispenser thereof. No man has any reason to complain of God, who is the master of the secrets of his own kingdom; but those to whom he communicates them, have abundant reason to adore and acknowledge in themselves the mercy which they never deserved. Hear and study the Scriptures; in them all religion is to be found, all the conduct of God, all the mysteries of Christ, and whatever passes in the formation and government of his church. They are an adorable mixture of clearness and obscurity, which enlightens and humbles the children of God, and blinds and hardens those of this world: but the light pro-

ceeds from God, and the blindness from the creature.

SECT. II.—*The Explication of the Parable.*

“ 11. ¶ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

The power of the devil over the hearts of the children of the world, is greater than it is imagined, and is not sufficiently dreaded. The number, diversity, and incumbrance of the affairs of the world; the continual motion and hurry in which worldly men are; that chain of employments, which to appearance are neither good nor bad, and of new designs which succeed one another; and that circle of pleasures, amusements, and vanities: these are the things wherein that art and policy consists which the devil uses, in order to render the word, good thoughts, and good desires fruitless, and to take away God’s seed out of their hearts and minds.

“ 13. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.”

Temptation makes it evidently appear whether we are really the servants of God. When the root of charity is wanting, the word of God can do but little in the heart, and that little is not lasting. Good inclinations and piety frequently continue, on no other account but only because nothing opposes them, and because the darling passion of the heart is not con-

tradicted ; but all disappears when once we are threatened with the loss of that which we love more than God, without being sensible of it. Let us take great care not to defer, till the time of temptation and trial, the necessary work of subduing and rooting out of our hearts whatever may hinder the truths of salvation from entering in and fixing there. They grow hard by evil habits ; we must labour to weaken and conquer these, if we desire the seed should take root in those, and remain secure in times of storms and tempest.

“ 14. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.”

Riches and pleasures are the thorns of life ; they choke all good desires whatever which are in the heart. There are three sorts of persons in whom Christian truths become unfruitful, through engagements which succeed either a good education, or a regular way of life, or retirement. 1. A young person of quality, who goes forth from under the care of a father, a mother, a prudent tutor, or a Christian preceptor ; and enters into the world, into offices of state, into designs of establishing himself, &c. which make him forget all. 2. A man who quits a private life, to give himself up entirely to trade, to business, and to the desire of riches. 3. One who passes from the holy repose of retirement, to a soft, idle, and effeminate life, and seeks nothing but his own ease. Let every man examine and judge himself.

“ 15. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

To receive the seed of the word, to keep it in the heart, and to bring forth fruit, are three different gifts of God, which we must beg of him; but the chief gift of all is the good and perfect heart. The good heart, which is fit to love, receive, retain, and practise the law and word of God, is that which has not these three bad qualities above-mentioned, and in which charity is stronger than concupiscence. There are three kinds of patience which are necessary for the elect, in order to bring forth fruit worthy of heaven. The patience or perseverance of prayer, necessary to keep and preserve the seed, in expectation of God's proper time and season; the patience of Christian perseverance, in bringing forth fruit to the end without being tired; and the patience of resistance and suffering in trials and persecutions, either internal from evil habits, or external from the hands of men. What, then, must we always pray, always labour, and always contend? This is the portion of the elect, the fruit of the divine word in their heart, and the continual exercise of their patience.

SECT. III.—*The Candle upon a Candlestick. Whoever hath, shall have more. Christ's Mother and Brethren.*

“ 16. ¶ No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.”

It is a matter, not merely of counsel, but of duty and obligation, that we should not possess graces, light, and talents, to no purpose. It is still a greater piece of infidelity, to hold the truth in captivity to

unrighteousness, and to the love of temporal conveniences. It is not sufficient to salvation, for a man to believe in his heart the truth of the gospel, he must make profession of it, and not be ashamed to give testimony thereto. Neither is it sufficient for him even to have been justified by faith and charity, but he must perform the works of them, and edify the church, and those who desire to enter into it.

“ 17. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest ; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.”

Well and good men may disguise their irregular intentions to themselves and others : they will one day appear manifest to the eyes of the whole universe. We hide ourselves from men for the short moment of this life ; we thereby avoid little troubles and inconveniences, and enjoy some small conveniences and advantages from the favour of the great, which passes away like a shadow : but when this shadow is vanished, then the light of the great day, which will make every thing manifest—truth which will judge every thing, and justice which will punish every thing and for ever, shall make unrighteousness evidently known, and overwhelm the cowardly and hypocritical.

“ 18. Take heed therefore how ye hear : for whosoever hath, to him shall be given ; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.”

Whoever improves the grace he has received, receives abundantly more. What person is there, who, either opening the gospel, or receiving from the mouth of pastors and preachers the seed and light of God’s

word, seriously reflects and considers how he ought to read or hear it; what use he is obliged to make of it; what account will be demanded of every truth; what reward God has decreed to the faithful use of it, and what punishment both to the abuse and to the making no use at all thereof? A man has properly nothing at all, when he has neither the knowledge of the Scriptures, nor the gifts which should be instrumental thereto, in such a manner as is profitable to salvation. Very often, even in this life, all is taken away, as a punishment of infidelity, ingratitude, and the abuse of God's gifts; and the light is turned into darkness.

“ 19. ¶ Then came to him his mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press. 20. And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee.”

He who has an ardent love for Christ, cannot be long absent from him. Whatever private conversations the blessed Virgin might have with her Son, this earnest desire to hear from his mouth the word of God, and to see him exercise the public functions of his ministry, was very commendable. To go to hear those whom God fills with his holy Spirit, that they may preach his truths worthily, is a respect and honour which we owe to his mission, his word, his goodness, and his designs. If ever curiosity were holy and allowable, it was this of desiring to hear the word made man, speak to men with all the knowledge and power of God. Had we but a lively faith, we should find the same advantage in his word.

“ 21. And he answered and said unto them, My

mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it."

An ecclesiastical person, a Christian, ought to forget every body, and even his relations, when the service of God is in question. Faith and charity are the things which unite us closely to him, by causing us to adhere to his word and truth. Christ does not despise his mother, but only shows us upon what account she is most to be esteemed; namely, on the account of her constant attention to divine truth, of her faithfulness in making all the use of it which was required of her, and of that union of grace and love which she had with his sacred humanity, not so much because she had given it him, as because the Son of God had made it his own, by causing it to subsist in his divine person. Let us learn of her, to love Christ in such a way as is worthy of him, and never to apply ourselves to holy things but after a holy manner.

SECT. IV.—*The Tempest appeased.*

" 22. ¶ Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. 23. But as they sailed, he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy."

The present life is but, as it were, a passage from one shore to another—from time to eternity. The world is the lake over which we must pass, the storm of wind is temptation, and the water with which the bark is filled, is that corruption which slides insensibly into the heart by the senses. Christ is asleep in

respect of us, when he suffers us to be tempted, when negligence causes our faith and vigilance to slumber, and the fervency of prayer begins to abate. If we do not see what the dangers of this life are, because they are not always sensible, let us but open the eyes of our faith, and we shall behold them with horror. Christ seems not to watch over us in the time of temptation, and as if he permitted all to the devil; but he sees and governs all things with a sovereign knowledge and wisdom.

“ 24. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, Master, we perish ! Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water; and they ceased, and there was a calm.”

Let us but awake Christ by prayer, when the storm arises; and the calm will be immediately restored to our heart. Let us make prayer familiar to us; for without his grace we are in danger of perishing every moment. When we have Jesus Christ at the bottom of our heart, we have reason to hope that temptations will be no more than trials, and that they will only serve to awaken our faith, to render us more watchful in prayer, and to make the almighty power of his grace manifest in us. The illustrious manner in which it shows itself in this miracle, is an emblem of that which grace performs in gaining the victory over temptations. It is to prayer that God joins these wonderful effects.

“ 25. And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they, being afraid, wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this ! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.”

In temptation our faith is frequently asleep, and

we imagine it is Christ who is so. Vouchsafe, O Jesus, often to repeat this wholesome reproof at the bottom of my heart; but do it in such a manner as may fill me with a holy dread, and an admiration of faith, at the sight of thy conduct towards thy elect, and towards thy church. He who has made her triumph over so many persecutors, is always with her to defend her. Even creatures the most insensible are subject to him. The greater proportion and dependency there is betwixt the sovereign and the created reason, betwixt the unchangeable and all-powerful will, and the weak and changeable will of man, the more ought we to believe that God can act upon this as sovereign Lord, and as God, without doing violence to its nature, or injuring its liberty, but, on the contrary, healing and perfecting both, by the communication of his supreme reason and his divine liberty.

SECT. V.—*The Legion of Devils cast out. The Swine drowned.*

“ 26. ¶ And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. 27. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.”

A soul possessed with the sin of uncleanness is, without comparison, a more horrid spectacle than this to the eyes of faith. The effects of this possession are these:—1st, It renders the heart a slave to sin and the devil, in a more servile, shameful, grievous, and insuperable manner. 2d, It strips a man of all

the divine gifts, and of all modesty. 3d, It causes him to wander and run about after the creatures, and to fly from his own heart, which is his house, and the proper place of his retirement. 4th, It changes this house, which ought to be holy, and to be the temple of the Holy Ghost, into a stinking sepulchre, full of infection. My God, suffer not this change. Lord, preserve those from corruption who make but one body with thyself! O Holy Spirit, defend thy temple from this profanation!

“ 28. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.”

The 5th effect of the sin of uncleanness in one possessed with it, is, that it causes him to look upon Christ, who is purity itself, as a mortal enemy. The 6th effect is, that it renders all converse and intercourse with Christ insupportable to him; and inclines him to make, if possible, even that of religion subservient to his brutal passion. What union is there not betwixt the head and the members, and what conformity ought there not to be answerable to this union? But what separation, what disparity does not the sin of impurity cause? The 7th effect of the passion of an unchaste person is, that it causes him both to fear lest God should come and disturb the bad peace of his conscience with some remorse, and audaciously to accuse him of injustice, when he would take him off from his impure life. Lord, were I ever to be so miserable, hearken not to the complaints or desires of my corrupt heart, but to the voice of thy own mercy. Torment me, and shake

the bed of my criminal repose, until thou hast thoroughly awakened me !

“ 29. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him : and he was kept bound with chains, and in fetters ; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)”

The 8th effect of the sin of impurity is, that it makes the unchaste person afraid lest God should convert him too soon. The 9th, that it causes him to violate all laws, to despise all admonitions, and to harden himself against all manner of threatenings. The 10th effect of this vice is, that it is the source of all sorts of temptations. The sinner is free only as to evil, without the grace of his Redeemer and Deliverer. This alone renders him free to do good, by breaking the chains which he has made of his own will. A sinner who flies from the presence of his God, and from his own heart, who is free from righteousness, and a slave to sin and the devil, whither is he not driven ? The region of heresy and sin is a most frightful wilderness, without water, without shelter, and without any path whereby to return out of it. We must inevitably perish therein, O Jesus, unless thou thyself vouchsafest to come to seek us, and to lead us back into the ways of thy truth and righteousness !

“ 30. And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name ? And he said, Legion : because many devils were entered into him.”

The 11th effect of this sin is, that it is always accompanied with many others. An unchaste person is fastened to sin by all the powers of his soul,

and all the senses of his body. How many devils have we not to fear ! The devil of wicked thoughts, in the mind ; that of filthy representations, in the fancy ; that of unchaste desires, in the heart ; that of curiosity, in the ears ; that of impudence, in the countenance ; of wandering glances, in the eyes ; and a whole legion upon the tongue, &c. O Jesus, who can deliver me from these furious enemies of my salvation, if I am abandoned by thee !

“ 31. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.”

The 12th effect of the passion of the unclean person is, that it causes him to frame a thousand different desires and unjust prayers, and even to wish that God himself was not just, that so his irregularities might go unpunished. The devil is permitted to be in the air and upon the earth, on purpose to exercise the elect, and to reap his harvest of the wicked, until the time of Christ’s coming to reap his at the last judgment. He dreads hell, not so much because it is the place of his punishment, as because he can find none to tempt there, all there being his own already. The devil is afraid of hell ; and yet there are men who either fear it not at all, or, at most, only like the devils, with a servile and slavish fear. If these persons never attain to a filial fear, what can they expect but the portion of devils ?

“ 32. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain : and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them.”

The 13th effect of impurity in a heart possessed therewith is, that it causes it continually to seek new

objects to satisfy its passion, and to abandon itself to every thing which is most detestable therein. This forced humiliation and suppliant condition of the devil show us plainly, that he is but a slave, and can do nothing by himself. How great is the infidelity of those who dread his power! How foolish and sacrilegious is their confidence, who consult him, who trust to his promises, and expect from him that assistance and wealth which he is not able to give them! He is only then to be feared, when a man does not fear sin. He is the hope of none but the desperate.

“ 33. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.”

The 14th effect of impurity is, that the unchaste person meets with his punishment even in the gratification of his desires, and perishes miserably with the accomplices of his passion. There is not a more dreadful sign of the wrath of God, than when he abandons the sinner to his lusts, and permits him to find means of satisfying them. His satisfaction lasts but for a moment. The devils who enter into the swine, are an emblem of those persons who seek all their happiness in sensual pleasures, and shorten their days by those very pleasures, which plunge them the sooner into eternal misery.

“ 34. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. 35. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. 36. They also which saw it

told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed."

The 15th effect of this vice is, that it takes away all good sense and reason, stupifies a man, and makes him become as it were a brute. The 16th and last effect is, that nothing but a miracle can recover him from this sinful habit. If Christ has not wrought one upon thee by a mercy of deliverance and cure, he has done it at least by a mercy of prevention; and even that prevention could not be effected, but by delivering and curing the will. A person possessed is a spectacle of horror to men, and his deliverance a subject of admiration: and the unchaste person, of whom the other is only a figure, is often esteemed, caressed, and envied under his miserable possession; and on the contrary despised, avoided, and ridiculed by the world, as soon as ever God has delivered him. O judgment of the world! O corruption of man's heart!

" 37. ¶ Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them: for they were taken with great fear. And he went up into the ship, and returned back again."

The knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the love of salvation, cannot long subsist together with the love of pleasures, and with an affection for temporal possessions, and the ease of this present life. Little does he know the value of a Saviour or of salvation, who chooses rather to be rich without Christ, than to be poor with him. The carnal man willingly renounces him, in order to enjoy that which he loves. Men will not understand, that it is a happiness to be

deprived of the objects of their desires, and delivered from the occasions of sin. In vain does God work miracle upon miracle to disengage us from them; there must be one wrought upon the heart itself to break its chains. Blind and senseless wretches, to be afraid of their Deliverer, even after he had delivered them from a legion of devils in the person of their countryman! Terrible is the judgment upon sinners, when God hears their prayers, as he does this of the devil. Vouchsafe to continue with me, O Lord, and hearken not to the irregular desires of my heart!

“ 38. Now the man, out of whom the devils were departed, besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying,”

He who has passed his life in uncleanness, ought not to think of following Christ in the company of the apostles, that is, in the priesthood. It is a sort of irregular and mistaken devotion, for a man to be made a priest upon no other view but that of withdrawing himself from vice and disorder, and of avoiding the occasions of sin. Bishops and priests ought to be penitents, 1. As being subject to the sins and infirmities of the righteous. 2. In order to prevent sins of another nature, and to suppress the principle and cause of them, which they carry within themselves. 3. On the account of the sins of their people and of the whole church, after the example of Christ.—But the state of priesthood and episcopacy is a state of holiness, and not of penance.

“ 39. Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.”

He who is cured of the vice of uncleanness, ought,
1. To live retired, either in his own house, or elsewhere, according to his state and ability, that he may there seriously consider the great things God hath done unto him, and the mysteries which Christ has accomplished for all sinners, and reflect with gratitude on the graces he received in order to his own conversion. 2. He ought to offer up continual thanksgivings to God. 3. To make amends for the scandal he has given. And, 4. To publish the mercy of God, when he comes abroad into the world.—We ought not to make the least difficulty of acknowledging our own misery, when the glory of God is concerned; and of publishing his mercy, when the edification of our neighbour depends upon it.

“ 40. And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him.”

Jesus Christ brings joy and gladness to a heart which has long expected and waited for him. The vicissitudes of devotion and coldness in a soul, cause it to set a greater value upon the assistance of grace. God sometimes suffers men to desire and expect him a long time, that he may find their hearts better disposed and prepared to receive him. It is a great matter to know how to expect God as we ought, and to wait his proper time without remissness and growing cold.

SECT. VI.—*The daughter of Jairus raised. The bloody issue healed.*

“ 41. ¶ And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue; and he

fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: 42. For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying."

Whenever we perceive our souls begin to grow weak in piety, to faint in the performance of our duty, or to be ready to fall through the violence of any temptation, our only way is, to humble ourselves, to have recourse to Christ, and to invite and beseech him by an humble and fervent prayer, that he would vouchsafe to come by his grace into the house of our heart. The generality of persons, either hazard or neglect the salvation of their souls, as if each of them had several, and might venture one. We have each of us but one only soul: we must love it exclusively of all things else, and fear its loss as that which is irrecoverable; we must be greatly concerned for it under all occasions of sin, which is its death; and often in its behalf fall down at Jesus' feet, who is its only physician.

" — (But as he went the people thronged him. 43. ¶ And a woman, having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any,"

Remission of sins is granted only whilst we are in the way, that is, during the time of this life. Concupiscence is a shameful, inveterate, and continual disease, which proceeds from original sin, and is incurable, and not to be healed by any but Jesus Christ. The law, philosophy, confidence in our own strength, and the presumption of free-will, do but inflame and increase it. Happy are we notwithstanding, if, after having experienced the insufficiency

of human, natural, and external remedies, we are truly humbled, and fully convinced, that thy grace, O Jesus, is the only remedy for the diseases of the soul, and the sickness of concupiscence.

“ 44. Came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanch'd.”

In order to be cured, we must, 1. Approach Christ by a belief of his power and goodness, and of the necessity of his healing grace. 2. We must think ourselves unworthy to appear in his presence, and to be looked upon by him. 3. We must cast ourselves at his feet, and there pour out our heart in prayer. 4. We must adore his sacred humanity, as the source of our own sanctification. 5. We must unite ourselves to him by partaking of his mysteries, the spirit and virtue of which are to purify our souls, humbly desiring him to apply them to us. 6. We must take care to honour his divine word, to render it familiar to us, and to put it in practice.

“ 45. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter, and they that were with him, said, Master, the multitude throng thee, and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?”

Abundance of Christians, as it were, press upon Jesus Christ in hearing his word, receiving the sacrament, and performing the outward part of religion; but few touch him by a lively faith, by a true Christian life, by the prayer of charity, and by the meditation, love, and imitation of his mysteries. Those numerous assemblies and multitudes of people, who fill the churches, and make the crowd at sermons, and yet cease not to go on in their usual course, in

following the world and their own passions, throng and press Christ, but do not touch him.

“ 46. And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.”

There is not so much as one good thought or inclination but what proceeds from Christ, and is an emanation from that fulness of grace and truth which is in him. God and Christ know in themselves the good which we do, because it is God who produces it in us by Jesus Christ: God by Christ, by his merits, by his Spirit, by his sacred humanity, as the instrument of the Divinity in all the works of sanctification, and in whatever has any relation thereto, particularly miracles. What virtue would there not stream forth from this fire of love to inflame our heart, when we possess it by the holy eucharist, had we but the heart of this poor woman; an humble heart, more to be desired by far than the most precious thing in the world!

“ 47. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and, falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.”

Humility, simplicity, acknowledgment, and confusion, when we reflect upon the gifts we have received of God, are the faithful guardians of grace, which we ought to imitate in this poor woman. It is a sign that this grace has penetrated very deep into the heart, when we begin to be ashamed and confounded at the sight of our own unworthiness. How far is this disposition, both from the insensibility of those who receive the blessings of God with-

out being in the least affected with them, and from the ingratitude of those who look upon them as a debt!

“ 48. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.”)

There is no inward peace, but only by the cure of our lusts; no cure but by the grace of Christ; and no grace but by faith, which is the first of all. Christ frequently praises faith, not with design to oppose it to good works, but to show that it is the fountain of them, and to take the Jews off from their confidence in the works of the law and in their own righteousness. Do thou, O Jesus, give, preserve, increase, perfect, and consummate in us this principle of true righteousness and of every good work! thou, who art the Author and Finisher of faith.

“ 49. ¶ While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue’s house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.”

It is usual for faith to find itself tempted and weakened by flesh and blood, when it is at the very point of receiving that which it desires. Those whom the devil cannot ruin by a confidence in themselves, he endeavours with all his might to ruin by taking from them their confidence in God and Christ. In losing this confidence, they lose the very soul of prayer; and in losing that, they lose all. Let us on no account be afraid to importune God with the earnestness of prayer: it is this importunity which he requires; in this consists the perseverance of prayer, to which every thing is promised.

“ 50. But when Jesus heard it, he answered him,

saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole."

The word of God nourishes and strengthens faith, and faith supports prayer under all occasions of discouragement: but this threefold knot is tied only by the grace of him who gives it to whom he pleases. God would have us prepare ourselves for the reception of his mercy by confidence and faith; but even this faith and confidence, and all preparation for his mercy, are no other than so many gifts of this very mercy itself. No human impotency, no natural impossibility whatever, ought to discourage us; because it is neither from man nor from nature that our salvation is to come, but from the almighty will of God.

" 51. And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden."

A man ought to have abundance of discretion, to know when to discover and when to conceal the works of God.

" 52. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth."

How little faith do we generally show in affliction, and on the death of our relations! We weep and bewail them most commonly, either out of ceremony or interest: whereas we ought either to weep through faith, in casting our eyes upon sin, which is the cause of death; or to rejoice through faith, in considering that the dead are delivered from sin, and from concupiscence, the source of it. Death, considered as an accident of nature, suggests only sentiments which savour of the corruption of nature; but considered in the order settled and appointed by God, it is a

necessary penance, the completion of the Christian sacrifice, the passage to a better life, the deliverance of a prisoner, the recalling of an exile, and the end of all the miseries of a sinner.

“ 53. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.”

The faith of true Christians, who look upon death only as a sleep, and expect the life of the world to come as their happiness, appears a folly to the eyes of the world. It is in this respect that the death of a Christian is a mystery of faith, as well as that of Jesus Christ. We behold one thing in it, and we believe another; an humbling and abasing death, which is the seed, and, as it were, the sacrament of a blessed life. The folly and delusion of the world will likewise appear in their turn, when it shall be evidently seen, that so many deaths which seemed glorious to its eyes, were only the seed and the beginning of an eternal death.”

“ 54. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise.”

Christ touches with his grace a soul dead in sin, and raises it by his power. Thou hast wrought this miracle, O Lord, more than once upon my heart: but I believe, I hope, I expect another to be wrought upon my body, when thou shalt re-animate dust and ashes by thy almighty voice, and command the dead to rise and appear before thee. Grant, O Jesus, that I may continually live in this hope, and let it be the constant rule of my conduct and behaviour.

“ 55. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.”

When the soul is truly risen again, it may be fed

with the holy eucharist, and not before. This is the bread of the living, and not of the dead; and if the dead eat it, it only makes them die the more. When once we shall be raised with that resurrection which will be performed in an instant, we shall then eat in the kingdom of God that bread which is the life thereof, and shall be for ever satisfied with that food of our souls, which is God himself, as being eternal truth.

“ 56. And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.”

By this example, Christ plainly teaches how necessary humility is to those whose labours are directed to the salvation of souls. The more extraordinary the conversions are, the more care they who have been instrumental in them by their ministry ought to take, not to ascribe to themselves the honour of them. Christ, who is the truth, has no fear upon his own, but only upon man’s account, who is nothing but vanity; and who is apt so much the more criminally to attribute to himself the works of God, as they are more divine. Let not this poison, Lord, insinuate itself into my heart !

CHAPTER IX.

SECT. I.—*The Mission and Power of the Apostles.*

“ 1. THEN he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.”

The call to the ministry, and the application to

the exercise of it, are two different graces : we must depend upon Christ for both. A man is often unsuccessful in the functions of the ministry, not for want of a call, but because he chooses and undertakes such a particular function of his own head, and upon other considerations than that of God's glory. The power of absolving is one thing ; the gift of moving and converting sinners, by casting out the devil of vice, and curing the diseases of the soul, is another.

“ 2. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.”

A man ought not to labour in the church till he has received, 1. A call ; 2. Power ; 3. Mission ; and, 4. Instruction. Our blessed Lord, when he sends his apostles, gives them at the same time means to prove their mission, and by outward miracles to oblige men to look upon them as the ministers of God : it is this which distinguishes them from false apostles, to whom the devil gives a mission without miracles. Christ here gives them the power to work only such miracles as should be beneficial to mankind ; to teach them, not to act in the spirit of Elias, or in that of the old law ; but in the spirit of the Saviour, and of his law, consisting wholly of gentleness and love. He does not give them the power to make rich, but to restore health, which is a blessing more natural, innocent, and common to all, than riches.

“ 3. And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money ; neither have two coats apiece.”

The mission and poverty of the apostles is the pattern of that of missionaries. Those who preach

up the love of eternal possessions, and an indifference to all perishing enjoyments, ought to do it by their life and conversation. Men will never be able to establish the kingdom of God in the hearts of people, so long as they do not appear fully persuaded themselves of those truths which they preach. And how can they appear to be so, if they plainly contradict them in their practice and behaviour? In order to persuade others to be unconcerned for superfluities, a man must not himself appear too much concerned even about necessities.

“ 4. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart.”

A minister ought to be very careful not to wander from house to house upon human motives. If he have the spirit of evangelical poverty, he will think himself well every where. The love of the conveniences of life, is a great hinderance to the work of God in a missionary or a minister of the gospel; because the poor, who cannot accommodate him with them, are those with whom there is most to be done in the business of salvation; and the rich, who enjoy them, are more likely to inspire into a minister an affection for them, than he is to wean those from them.

“ 5. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them.”

How extremely dangerous is it not to receive the blessing which offers and presents itself to us! Though we do not dishonour the ministers of the truth in the very manner here set down, yet we do it perhaps in several others which are more criminal.

Is it nothing, think we, to decry them by calumnies, to cause them to be driven away and persecuted out of envy, to represent their doctrine as false and corrupt, to render them useless in any manner whatever, and to hinder the fruit of the divine word in their mouth? Alas, who can express what damage is hereby done to the church, and what crimes a man thus renders himself either directly guilty of, or in some measure accountable for!

“ 6. And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere.”

They who would imitate Christ, must seek rather to instruct the poor than the rich, and join, as much as they are able, bodily relief with spiritual instruction. O wonderful goodness of our blessed Saviour, to be the Saviour of bodies as well as of souls! Hereby he makes it evident, that he came to reform the whole man, corrupted by sin in the outward man as well as in the inward. If ever such miracles were wrought by any others besides Christ and his servants, let his religion and doctrine be taken for a mere human invention; but let it be owned by all for the true religion, if it be a thing unheard of, that men should cure, not only some particular person by choice, but all manner of sick persons without distinction.

“ 7. ¶ Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead;”

Ambition and a bad conscience are endless causes of perplexities and disquiets. There is a very great

difference betwixt knowing all that was done by Christ, and knowing it after a saving manner. Herod was extremely well informed of all, because he needed only eyes and ears to be so: but he was not in the least changed or altered thereby; because no man knoweth the Son to any benefit or advantage, but only he to whom the Father has been pleased to reveal him. Thou hast vouchsafed, O my God, to reveal to me this Son, in whom is my salvation and eternal life; but cease not, I beseech thee, to reveal him to my heart, lest it should know him only unprofitably.

“8. And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. 9. And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him.”

Let us admire how fruitful in false notions of religion the mind of man is, when it is not enlightened of God. Natural curiosity, with respect to men of God, produces nothing of itself towards salvation. It is instrumental thereto, when God designs it for that purpose, as in Zaccheus: it is prejudicial, when men have not grace to make a good use of it, as in the case of Herod. The death of John, in which Herod's veneration for him terminated, the design of this tyrant upon the life of Christ, and the scorn he made of him at the time of his passion, are the works which make it evidently appear, from what principle this desire to see Christ proceeded. What an example is this for the great!

SECT. II.—*The Return and Retirement of the Apostles. The Miracle of the Five Loaves.*

“ 10. And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city, called Bethsaida.”

Ministers, after their evangelical labours, ought,
1. To give an account thereof to the prelates. 2. To recollect themselves in retirement with Christ. 3. To interrupt sometimes the course of their instructions, on purpose to make them the more desired.—See here the pattern of a bishop, intent on forming under his eyes the subordinate pastors, and who is wont to retreat with them from time to time, in that retirement, to reform whatever they may find amiss in themselves, by prayer, by paternal instructions, by private conferences, and by examining the maxims which they follow, the conduct which they observe, and the faults to which they are subject in the administration of the sacraments, in preaching, in catechetical lectures, &c.

“ 11. And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.”

Observe here four effects of the goodness of Christ.
1. He receives those well who seek him. 2. He instructs them. 3. He heals them. 4. He feeds them.—This is the pattern of the four chief duties of a good pastor. He is happy, when his charity has so far gained the hearts of his sheep, that they themselves seek him who should seek them. More

happy still, if he instructs them with so much care and blessing, that he sees the fruit thereof in the cure of their souls. But most happy of all, if he has nothing more to do, than only to feed them in the desert of this life, till they come to be satisfied in their own country.

“ 12. ¶ And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals : for we are here in a desert place.”

God would have men sensible of human weakness, before he exercises his divine power. We can want nothing, when we have Jesus Christ ; much less, if we have forsaken all to seek him in retirement. It is a counsel merely human, to advise a man to leave the safety and sweetness of solitude, on purpose to seek in the world a subsistence, which is never wanting but to those who are themselves wanting in fidelity to their state and condition, in trust to the providence of God, and in affection towards Jesus Christ. There is no barren desert for the creature, when faith in the Creator is lively and fruitful.

“ 13. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes ; except we should go and buy meat for all this people.”

The pastors ought themselves to feed their sheep : Christ, who commands them to do it, helps their insufficiency. God does not command things impossible ; those which appear so being impossible only to human weakness. But his commandment admonishes us, both to do whatever is in our power, and

to beg of him whatever is not; and then he himself comes to our assistance, on purpose to make us able to perform it. We offer up an excellent prayer, when we join a grateful acknowledgment of the benefits we have received already, to an humble confession of our own inability to do that which God requires of us more. Command, Lord, but, at the same time, give that which thou dost command.

“ 14. (For they were about five thousand men.) And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company. 15. And they did so, and made them all sit down. 16. Then he took the five loaves, and the two fishes; and, looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude.”

See here the duties of a true bishop, who would feed his people with the word of God. 1. He ought to exhort them to hear it with an humble and sedate reverence, perfectly free and disengaged from all secular cares. 2. He must first take this food, and fill himself therewith. 3. He ought frequently to lift his heart up to God. 4. To draw down the divine blessing upon his people by his prayers and good works. 5. He must break the loaves, by giving such instructions as are suited to the capacity of all. 6. He must do that by the hands of holy priests, which he cannot do by himself. 7. He must perform every thing with order and discipline in the distribution of this bread of the soul: and religiously observe the division of parishes, of which we may here behold a slight draught. 8. He must give that to the subordinate pastors which they are to give to the

people; that is, he must fill them with solid instructions and the knowledge of salvation, furnish them with means of attaining it, and put into their hands the doctrine which has been transmitted down from Christ by those of the apostles.

“ 17. And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.”

The word of God is extremely nourishing, and not to be exhausted or consumed. The more one is filled therewith, the more plentifully does it abound to him who reads it. That pastor, who, upon an unforeseen necessity of preaching God’s word, commits himself to him, and, in speaking out of the abundance of his heart, trusts entirely to his promise, finds sufficient both to fill his people, and plentifully to feed himself. Even the fragments, which remain after the feast of God’s word, are precious: a man ought to gather them up for himself by meditation, after he has fed others by preaching.

SECT. III.—*St. Peter’s Confession. The Cross to be borne. We must lose all in order to be saved.*

“ 18. ¶ And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am?”

Christ asks his disciples concerning their faith, after prayer, and in the privacy of retirement; on purpose to teach bishops, not to instruct, nor examine into the faith of inferior pastors in the presence of the people; and to do it with abundance of prudence, and after having begged of God the Spirit of wisdom. He asks for his apostles that very faith,

whereof he demands of them an account, and shows Peter, that the revelation made by the Father was the fruit of the prayer of the Son. (Matt. xvi. 17.) We must pray before we catechize, after the example of this adorable Head of catechists: and much more prayer is still necessary, in order to form the ministers of the church.

“ 19. They answering, said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again.”

There is nothing but what is either uncertain or false, when the spirit of man undertakes to speak of God. Christ gave occasion to his disciples to mention the several errors of the world, in relation to his person, that they might be the more fully convinced that their faith did not proceed from themselves. This is the use which we ourselves ought to make of those mistakes and false conjectures of the mind of man which fill the world. Every thing ought thus to be instrumental to the increase of our gratitude, our love, and our faith, that we may be of the number of those to whom all things work together for good.

“ 20. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering, said, The Christ of God.”

There is nothing but what is true and certain, when the Spirit of God speaks by his ministers. The faith of the pastors ought to be more enlightened than that of the people. Christ applies himself to establish and confirm in his apostles the belief of his incarnation, as the foundation of all religion. It is all contained in brief under this great expression, “ The Christ of God;” that is to say, a man

anointed and consecrated by his personal union with the eternal Son of God, to be the High Priest of the Christian religion, the true Worshipper of God, the Saviour and Mediator of men, and the Head, who, pouring out of the fulness of his Spirit and grace upon sinners, makes them Christians, and forms them into his mystical body, to which he gives his own name, and of which he raises up a living and eternal temple to God his Father.

“ 21. And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; 22. Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.”

There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent, concerning the divine mysteries. Man is both unworthy and incapable of hearing them, before Christ has, by his sufferings and death, merited for him the grace requisite thereto. We have here a symbol of the faith, or a short creed, taught by Christ himself, which comprehends all under the three great mysteries, of his incarnation, his passion and death, and his resurrection. How profitable, how pleasant is it, to make this the continual object of our faith, adoration, love, imitation, meditation, and hope !

“ 23. ¶ And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

What is meant by the connection of this verse with the former, if not, that the mysteries of the Head must be accomplished likewise in the members; and that those who have by baptism been made partakers of the divine nature in Christ, are one day to

partake of his resurrection ; but not unless they have partaken of his sufferings and death. To suffer and to die the death of the gospel, is to resist in ourselves the spirit and inclinations of Adam, continually to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, to imitate the sufferings of Christ by mortification, and to die to our own passions, in order to follow the motions of his Spirit. Take particular notice of these words, “to them all,” and “daily :” no person then is excused, no day excepted. Of what therefore do those think, to what do they aspire, who make every day a day of pleasure, luxury, and diversion? Who has a right to shake off the yoke of the cross, but only he who designs to have a right to nothing but hell?

“ 24. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”

He who loves himself with respect to this life only, hates himself as to eternity. See here that which makes all the vast difference which there is betwixt the life of true Christians, and that of worldly persons. Both would willingly be saved and live happy : but the former, purchase the blessed life of eternity, by the cross and the mortifications of this momentary life ; the latter, purchase a mere shadow of transitory felicity, by an eternal cross and death, and a punishment without end. Teach me, Lord, to save my life by losing it, and to be every day extremely careful not to lose it even in seeking to save it. For it is thou, O Saviour of the world, who art the great master and teacher of this important and only necessary lesson !

“ 25. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?”

Nothing can compensate the loss sustained by him who loses his soul. Let us then rather suffer the loss of all things, than that of our salvation. Let us but weigh the gain and the loss which there is in following or not following the rules of the gospel; and we shall soon be convinced that it is no better than madness to be in the least doubt or suspense what to do. By doing the first, we lose at the most nothing but what we must necessarily lose in a few years, or perhaps months, and what a philosopher, or a reasonable man, judges unworthy of his fondness and affection. By not doing it, we lose every thing to all eternity!

“ 26. For whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.”

Whosoever is ashamed of the truth while it is humbled and oppressed in this world, shall be humbled and confounded before truth itself, glorious and triumphant in heaven. It is a holy kind of boldness, not to be ashamed of the humiliations of Christ, or of any thing in his ways which seems a debasement to the eyes of the world. It is very just that he, who in time has preferred himself before God, should in eternity be abandoned to his own choice. Whoever has not thought God worthy of him, is by no means worthy of God. The testimony which God requires of us, renders him neither more rich nor more happy; but upon his, our eternal happiness entirely depends. Though the being faithful to him

may cost us our lives, what do we lose which we do not receive in him again an hundred-fold?

SECT. IV.—*The Transfiguration.*

“ 27. But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.”

That which Christ does here with respect to his apostles, he frequently does with respect to his elect, by a certain confidence and presage of the glory he prepares for them imprinted on the bottom of their hearts. We see this kingdom established in the world by grace now almost seventeen ages; and yet untractable and obstinate minds can hardly be persuaded of the truth of it. I know, O Lord, that I cannot behold the consummation and glory of it without dying; give me, therefore, that desire and earnest longing which I ought to have for that happy moment which is to transport me into that eternal kingdom!

“ 28. ¶ And it came to pass, about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter, and John, and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.”

In order to a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, and the secrets of his kingdom, he must raise us above ourselves. This is a privilege granted to very few. In order fully to learn Christ, it is necessary to pray much; and in order to pray as we ought, we must have him with us, and raise ourselves with and by him from the earth toward the holy mountain. It belongs to him to conduct us to God his Father. Take and separate my heart, O Jesus, from this tumult and confusion of human things, lift

it up, unite it to, and fix it on thyself, and on thy Father, by a true Christian prayer.

“ 29. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering.”

It is in prayer that God discovers himself to men: it is by this that the inward part of man is altered, and, as it were, transfigured. A soul nourished with prayer, appears even outwardly white and glistering, through recollection, modesty, mortification of the senses, simplicity, silence, candour of behaviour, and innocence of manners.

“ 30. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias :”

The law and the prophets breathe nothing but Jesus Christ ; and it is prayer which is the key of the Scriptures, which lets us into the spirit of the law, which gives us an insight into the prophecies, and therein discovers the mysteries of Christ. There are three things which we must have continually before our eyes when we read the Scriptures of the Old Testament : namely, Jesus Christ, who is therein typified and foretold ; the law of charity, to which that of Moses tends ; and the economy of the church and the sanctification of the elect, which are represented in the prophets, and prefigured even in all the histories of the Old Testament, and in all the events which are related there.

“ 31. Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”

Christ appears but one moment in his glory, and even then speaks of his sufferings and death. Let us learn of him never to lose sight of that moment

which is to separate us from this world. In the midst of joy, and even of spiritual prosperity, we ought to remember, that we must purchase the joys of the heavenly Jerusalem by the sacrifice of ourselves. Christ's decease, or departure out of the world, comprehends two things: his death, which, being suffered in obedience, opens heaven, as that of Moses, happening by the express command of God, was almost immediately followed by the people's entrance into the land of promise; and his ascension, which was prefigured by the taking up of Elias into heaven."

" 32. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him."

The sight of Christ's glory, and the presence of Moses and Elias, are a representation of that lively faith concerning heavenly things, and of that knowledge of the Scriptures, which Christ gave to his apostles and to apostolical men, to qualify them for the work of the gospel. The sleep and waking of the disciples are an emblem of the sleep of death, and of our being awaked at the resurrection, which will open our eyes to the beauties of eternity, and unfold to us all the mysteries and truths of the law and the prophets. O desirable moment, when, being waked, as it were, out of a profound sleep, all the beauty of this world will appear to us only as a dream, and the light of eternity shall clearly show us Jesus Christ and his whole church glorified in God!

" 33. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles;

one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias : not knowing what he said."

They know not the nature of the Christian religion, who would fain enjoy rest and glory before labour and suffering. The rest and satisfaction which prayer and meditation afford, is very sweet and pleasant to one who has a relish of truth, and a mind open to the mysteries of the Scriptures, so as to discover in them Christ and his church. This is, as it were, a third heaven, which a man must leave, in order to form Christ and his church in hearts by the ministry of the word, when he is called thereto by God.

" 34. While he thus spake, there came a cloud and overshadowed them : and they feared as they entered into the cloud."

God frequently permits a cloud to overshadow the light which has illuminated a man in prayer, and fear to succeed the consolation which he has tasted therein. He thereby teaches souls to rely on nothing here below, and entirely to depend upon him from one moment to another. Christ enters into the cloud, when he leaves us under the obscurity of faith, by withdrawing from us that light and sensible comfort which we sometimes experience in our devotions. The secret is, to believe, and to put our whole trust and confidence in God.

" 35. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son ; hear him."

See here a representation of the perfect adoption of the children of God. Christ is substituted in the place of Moses, to give us not only the law, but the spirit and truth of it. Whom will we hear, if we refuse to hear Jesus Christ ? He speaks to

us in so many divers manners, by his life, by his death, and by all his mysteries; by his gospel, by his church, and by his servants; by his benefits, by his chastisements, and by his inspirations. Shall we be deaf to so many different voices?

“ 36. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.”

Jesus alone is to us instead of the law, the sacrifices, and the prophets. Our true happiness consists, in looking upon him alone as our law and pattern; in following him alone as our Moses in the desert of this world; and in desiring his Spirit alone instead of that of Elias. Since truth is not properly ours but God’s, we must be so faithful as not to speak of divine truths, but only so far as the Spirit moves us thereto, either by himself, or by those who have a right to open our mouths. It is always the safest way not to divulge or publish extraordinary favours and graces: they are a treasure which ought to be carefully hid, for fear lest vanity should rob us of it.

SECT. V.—*The Lunatic. The Passion foretold.*

“ 37. ¶ And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him.”

After the sweetness of retirement and the repose of prayer, a man must return to his employment and resume his labour. God shows the ministers of the gospel the fruit of retirement and prayer, in the eagerness of the people, who come either to hear the

word, or to seek a cure. It is a very great comfort to a pastor, when those whom he ought to seek in all places, come on purpose to meet him, and in some measure prevent his pastoral care.

“ 38. And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son; for he is mine only child :”

He who begs one look of mercy, begs every thing. God has already looked upon that person, who, knowing the absolute necessity of this look, desires and implores it. To beg it with a loud cry, is to beg it with a great faith and an ardent prayer. There are but few among the crowd whose faith cries out after this manner. That which it ought above all things to believe, is, that Christ is Lord of the heart, and can with one single look change and cure it. Our soul, our heart, is, as it were, our only child. He who thinks seriously of this, must conclude, that he has no other business in the world besides the salvation of this only child, the loss of which is irreparable.

“ 39. And lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again; and, bruising him, hardly departeth from him.”

How dreadful is that man’s condition, whom sin has possessed from his youth ! The devil is absolute master of his heart, renders his tongue a world of iniquity, causes him by continual relapses to cleave more and more to the earth, and kindles every day new passions which shake and torment him. The intervals are very rare and short in a habitual sinner: a lively and ardent passion is always seeking to satisfy itself, and by so doing renders itself more incurable.

Vouchsafe, O Lord, to grant eyes to sinners, that they may perceive the total subversion of their hearts, and all the disorder and confusion which sin has caused therein.

“ 40. And I besought thy disciples to cast him out ; and they could not.”

God often suffers sinners to struggle a long time against their evil habits, on purpose to make them sensible of the nature of sin. The first endeavours of a sinner, represented to us by the prayer of this man, are not altogether fruitless, though they may seem to be so ; since they increase his desire of deliverance, and convince him that Christ alone is the Saviour.

“ 41. And Jesus, answering, said, O faithless and perverse generation ! how long shall I be with you, and suffer you ? Bring thy son hither.”

Want of faith is an obstacle to abundance of graces. It is with great justice that Christ blames it, and that not without some indignation, after all which he had done to establish faith and confidence in his sovereign power. This reproach and emotion are not an effect of impatience ; but a transport of zeal, which makes his long patience to be more particularly observed. It hereby evidently appears, that he did not seek his own satisfaction, when he continued so long with this faithless and perverse people. Who after this will suffer himself to be guided by his aversions or inclinations ?

“ 42. And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.”

When a soul is willing to be converted, the devil makes his last efforts: but Christ renders them ineffectual by his grace. Whatever he permits the devil to do against his elect, is only for the glory of his own grace, and to the confusion of the tempter. It is by his almighty power that he casts the devil out of the body and the soul, and puts his Spirit into possession of the heart of man. He need only exert one single act of his will, in order to make all things obey him; and no created will can hinder that which the Omnipotent will would have me do, by causing me to will it.

" 43. ¶ And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But, while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, 44. Let these sayings sink down into your ears: * for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men." [* *Fr. Hearts.*] .

It is not enough to admire the effects of the mighty power of God; we must also apply ourselves to consider the sufferings of Christ, which are far more inconceivable to human understanding. Happy the child of the cross, who carries a livelier impression thereof in the bottom of his heart than in his memory! It is a thing extremely rare and uncommon for us to endeavour to alter the minds of those who are intent on admiring us, by setting before their eyes whatever is most humbling, and tends to create the meanest opinion of us. The example which Christ gives us of this, is not very grateful to the children of Adam. To see a God suffer in the flesh, is something much more wonderful than to see him cast out devils by his Spirit. He delivers men from the power of the

devil; and he suffers himself to be delivered into the hands of men: his power gives way to his love.

“ 45. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.”

How much above the understanding of man, are the designs of God concerning the death of his Son! We must show more fidelity and humility in adoring them, than curiosity in desiring to pry into them. The carnal man does not willingly consider objects which exact of him great duties, and such as are grievous to nature. He who fears that he shall find, in the passion of Christ, an obligation to suffer, and to crucify the flesh with him, does not love to employ his thoughts on that mystery. Lord, deliver me from this carnal fear; and make me love to ask thee, and to inquire concerning this subject, by meditating upon thy Scriptures, and invoking thy Spirit by prayer!

SECT. VI.—*He who thinks himself the least, is the greatest. He who is not against Christ, is for him.*

“ 46. ¶ Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest.”

What blindness is it in the members of a Head intent on nothing but humbling himself, to think of nothing but exalting themselves! Self-love must needs be strangely delighted with the thoughts of greatness, since men are not exempt from them in the very school of humility. Christ takes off his disciples from the consideration of his power, to fix their minds upon that of his humiliations: and they leave this profitable subject to think of their own

greatness, and how to raise themselves above others. Lord, deliver me not up to this irregular inclination.

“ 47. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him,”

Christian childhood obliges us to be humble, meek, and sincere. Man, in innocence, had God alone for his pattern, being created in his image: man, in a state of sin, is reduced to frame himself by a child, and to study him as his pattern, having by sin rendered himself like the very beasts themselves. Since, then, we ought to imitate a child, it is thy divine childhood, O Jesus, on which I will fix my eyes, not only as the pattern which I am to consider, but as the object which I ought to adore and love, which is to sanctify me, and in which I may certainly find the grace to imitate thee in that state and condition.

“ 48. And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.”

It is counted as nothing in this world to despise or treat those ill, whom Christ represents under this figure; because God but seldom punishes or rewards in this life. They who have faith depend upon his word, and rest assured of his faithfulness. God is in Christ, and Christ in his members, who conform themselves to his inclinations with the docility of a child: he takes a particular care of them, and accepts in them all the good which is done to them. True greatness consists in humility; but it is a spiritual greatness, which carnal men do not understand.

“ 49. ¶ And John answered and said, Master,

we saw one casting out devils in thy name ; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us."

Holy persons in this life are not always free from a zeal without knowledge, nor from emulation in their conduct. Every one ought carefully to examine himself upon this point. The name of Jesus Christ is powerful and terrible to the devil, even in the mouth of one who is a stranger to him. From the time when Christ first condescended to make use of such to work miracles as do not follow him, he condemns the jealousy and envy of his disciples. Religious societies, as well as private persons, have great reason to preserve themselves from this spirit, which makes them either faintly commend, or openly condemn, the good which is done by other societies. They are not settled in the church for their own glory, but for that of their Master.

" 50. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not : for he that is not against us is for us."

It is the part of true charity to love and to justify that which is good, in what place or person soever it is found. There is no neutrality for the heart in the kingdom of God : it must be either for Christ, or for his enemy. It is not so, as to the outward profession : a man may openly favour the church, and yet neither have any thing of the spirit of it, nor belong at all to God.

SECT. VII.—*James and John are for calling down fire from heaven.*

" 51. ¶ And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,"

That man knows himself but little, who does not fortify himself, by faith and prayer, against temptation and the fear of sufferings, when he foresees them. The apprehension of death ought not in the least to discourage those who know that it is the way which leads to the heavenly Jerusalem. Let thy strength and steadfastness, O Jesus, fortify our weakness, and raise our drooping spirits at the prospect of that day, which takes a true Christian out of this life, only to re-unite him to thee, O life eternal, whom the Father has vouchsafed to give us.

“ 52. And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. 53. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.”

Men have but little inclination to expose themselves to repulses, when they foresee them as our blessed Saviour did. He exposes both himself and his disciples to them, because he would accustom them thereto by his own example. Piety often renders us odious or disagreeable to those who have deserted it. Such conjunctures are proper to acquaint us thoroughly with ourselves; and to satisfy us, whether we really seek God, and desire to please none but him. When we have once taken the road to heaven, we have but little credit any longer in the world. Nothing can give us a greater assurance that we are in the way of salvation, than to see ourselves despised and rejected of those who will not think of any other life. God frequently separates us from such persons by means of some repulses and disgusts, without which we should have continued always fond of them.

“ 54. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”

It often happens, that the ministers of the church, under pretence of zeal for her interests, offend against Christian meekness. The church knows no such thing as revenge, and her ministers ought not to know it either. Their wrath should be incensed against sin, not against the sinner. The fire of heaven is one day to come down to purify the world by destruction: at present, it comes down only to sanctify it by edification. We must consult God, and address ourselves to Christ, in order to know our duty, and to learn to moderate our zeal.

“ 55. But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.”

The growing cold on the account of ill usage, and, much more, sharpness and bitterness of mind, are not according to the Spirit of Christ. The disciples of a God who dies for his enemies, ought to think of nothing but laying down their lives for those very persons who do them harm: so far must they be from revenging themselves on those who only refuse to do them good. God permits the inclinations of concupiscence to appear sometimes in the holiest persons, on purpose that they may acknowledge that charity is a gift of God; and that all the world may plainly see, that there is no person whatever in whom nature is not corrupted.

“ 56. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”

The spirit of the new law is a spirit of meekness and charity. The ministers of the church ought always to remember, that they are the disciples of him who came only to do good, and that their ministry is a ministry of salvation. Nothing is more distant from his Spirit, than for a man to make use of authority, force, or violence, to enter upon a benefice, or to settle himself in a city, only under pretence of doing good there: Christ having not thought fit to oblige even a single village to receive him in his necessity, and having blamed his apostles upon somewhat of the like nature.

SECT. VIII.—*The man who would have followed Christ. We must not look back.*

“ 57. ¶ And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Human presumption undertakes and embraces every thing with eagerness, and thinks nothing too difficult. Christian humility has for its foundation, the acknowledgment of a man’s own inability as to every thing which is good, a belief of the necessity of grace in order to perform it, a conviction of his own unworthiness to receive this assistance, and a firm hope in the free mercy of God, and in the grace of Jesus Christ.

“ 58. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”

Abundance of persons seem to seek Jesus Christ, who only, under his name, seek ease, honour, self-satisfaction, the conveniences of life, &c. If they

find that which they seek, it will be only to their greater condemnation. The poverty of Christ, is the patrimony of those who make profession of following him in the way of perfection. All his true children ought to love, honour, and imitate it, in some measure at least, and to have their heart prepared for it. They are unworthy to serve him, who seek other things in his service. O Jesus, Saviour of men, how few are there who honour thy poverty, in bearing it with thy Spirit; not to reckon those who fly from it, and have it in abhorrence! Cause us, Lord, by the power of thy grace, to love this virtue.

“ 59. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.”

Fondness for relations is an obstacle to salvation. Christ rejects the person who desired to follow him, and draws him who was for delaying it; to teach us that his will and grace ought to fix our call, and not our own choice and appointment. Self-love never wants pious pretences to excuse itself, with some decency, from doing the will of God. Happy that person whom God does not abandon to the resistance and opposition which he makes to the grace of his call!

“ 60. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.”

The ministers of the church cannot be too often told, that they should leave the world to the people of the world. When the heart is sincere, and nothing hinders from entering into the way which Christ shows us, but only the fear of being wanting in some

pious offices, he soon makes us surmount this obstacle. When God accompanies his external word and commandment with the unction of his Spirit, and the internal power of his grace, it works in the heart that obedience which it requires. It is as dangerous not to preach the kingdom of God when a man is called to that office, as it is to intrude himself into it of his own accord. It is not complying with the designs of God either way.

“ 61. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee ; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house.”

Self-love always finds something to lay hold of, in order to maintain itself in its liberty. The devil thinks he has gained enough, in making a man defer the good which he cannot altogether prevent. We run a very great risk in not doing the works of God at the very time when he requires them to be done. The devil desires only a little time ; and a voluntary delay involves us frequently in difficulties which are involuntary, and out of which we shall perhaps never be able to extricate ourselves. God certainly well deserves to be obeyed without the least delay. That which we object to the execution of his designs, is sometimes the very thing from which he would chiefly disengage and set us loose.

“ 62. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

How dangerous a return is it for a man to seek the world again, after he has once quitted it ! If to have still a fondness and affection for things in themselves indifferent, be to look back, how criminal

is the pursuit of worldly desires in those who are consecrated to God ! Pastors who still retain some claims and pretensions to the world, cannot be faithful ministers. A man is a slave to the world, from the time that he stands in need of it. He who thinks it necessary to cultivate its favour, is not far from betraying the interests of God and the church.

CHAPTER X.

SECT. I.—*The Mission and Instruction of the Seventy Disciples. The impenitent Cities.*

“ 1. AFTER these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face, into every city and place whither he himself would come.”

Christ sends his disciples two and two, to teach them to labour in the church in the spirit of concord and charity. The office of priests is to prepare men to receive Jesus Christ. He who prepares the will of sinners himself, by turning it as he pleases with an almighty facility, has no need of the ministry of his servants; but his design is, to join the members of his body one to another by a mutual dependence, and to give to his church a form of government suited to its present state upon earth.

“ 2. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.”

A man must not of his own accord run to the harvest: but he must pray the Lord of the harvest, that

he would send forth labourers, and must be himself disposed to labour. This person complains of negligent pastors and scandalous ministers, who might perhaps have turned away this judgment from the church, had he but prayed as he ought. When we see any of that profession corrupt and disorderly, let us descend into ourselves, and attribute it to our own sins and negligence. The church is obedient to this command of our blessed Lord, when it prescribes fasts and prayers. Let us join with her; and with her offer up our fasts, our prayers, and our groans.

“ 3. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.”

Lambs among wolves are the disciples of Christ amidst the people of the world, in order to convert them, more by labour, patience, good example, meekness, and charity, than by the word itself. It belongs to thee, O Lamb without blemish, who didst deliver thyself up to wolves, and who changest at thy pleasure wolves into lambs—it belongs to thee to guard both the pastors and lambs of thy flock, from those wolves who assault them, either openly or in sheep’s clothing.

“ 4. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way.”

Christ puts the trust and confidence of his ministers to all imaginable trials, that they may learn once for all to depend entirely upon God, in whatever relates to their ministry, and to rely on none but him. In order to be a true evangelical minister, a man must be fond of nothing, not even of life itself; he must be always ready to expose it to wolves, and to neglect, when God requires it, the ordinary means of

preserving it, but never taken up with the care of making friends on purpose to procure them.

“ 5. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.”

Christian peace is the greatest good which we can wish to our neighbour. This is the wealth which the truly poor in Christ’s account distribute in all places. Those who enter into houses, and creep into families, only to make divisions, and to profit thereby, are very unworthy of so sacred a ministry. No house is to be excluded from this blessing, not even that of an enemy.

“ 6. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it : if not, it shall turn to you again.”

God would have the word of peace delivered to all, though all be not children of peace and of the promise. It belongs not to men to make this distinction ; it is hid in God from all eternity, and shall be entirely made manifest at the end of the world. An evangelical labourer turns every thing to advantage, as well the hardness and impenitence of some, as the fidelity and obedience of others.

“ 7. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give : for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.”

To maintain the ministers of the church is according to divine and natural right; but they themselves are not to make use of it, but only with edification, and in the spirit of poverty. That man who uses the credit which the gospel gives him, in order to procure good entertainment, well deserves to have no other reward. He always finds sufficient, who seeks no more than the necessities of life : it is only sen-

suality which is never satisfied. A labourer in the gospel must expect at the hands of men no other recompense but a comfortable subsistence: that which he expects from God is neither sensible nor temporal.

“ 8. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you;”

An evangelical labourer, to satisfy the necessities of life, may make use of all such things as are set before him, and are not forbidden, provided it be done without either eagerness or affectation. If a missionary, a pastor, or a preacher, do not show a great indifference towards every thing which relates to bodily wants, he will never be able much to advance the work of God. He ought to imitate his Master, who preached up the contempt of these things by contemning them himself.

“ 9. And heal the sick that are therein; and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”

The Shepherd and Bishop of souls takes great care to recommend the joining, as much as possible, temporal relief with spiritual. He never sent his disciples to do the least hurt to men, but always to do them good. The conquerors of the earth destroy all with fire and sword, to render themselves masters of the kingdoms of others: the Son of God sends his ministers, with no other intent, but freely to offer his kingdom to all men, and to oblige them to accept it by all sorts of benefits. This kingdom is come nigh unto us: we have but one step to make. Let us only pass from the love of ourselves to the love of God, and his kingdom is our own.

“ 10. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, 11. Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”

Miserable is that person who receives not the truth, nor the wholesome admonitions which are given him. To be deprived of the word of God, and of the assistance of his ministers, is a punishment which is so much the greater, as it is less sensible to sinners. Let us fear and tremble, lest the truth, which is preached to us as a means of salvation, should, through the hardness of our hearts, become a testimony against us.

“ 12. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.”

Since the rejecting of the truth and the maxims of the gospel, is more severely punished than the greatest crimes, let us take great care that we do not shut our heart against some of them. Christ being the only refuge of sinners, whoever rejects him, and refuses to have him for his Saviour, what other refuge can he promise himself? The men of Sodom made an attempt only against angels; the Jews against Jesus Christ, whilst he was passible and mortal; but wicked Christians do this against him in his glorious and immortal state: how much more rigorously therefore will the divine justice be executed against Christians, who abuse Jesus Christ and his blood, and despise his graces?

“ 13. ¶ Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done

in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sack-cloth and ashes."

It is an adorable abyss of the divine judgments, that the gospel should be preached to those who were to reject it, and not to those who would certainly have repented. Where is the merit, upon which heretics pretend that God regulates the distribution of his favours and graces? Let us acknowledge, that he distributes them according to a method full of wisdom and power, in the causes and reasons whereof we are altogether ignorant.

" 14. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you."

The impenitency of the Jews is punished in proportion to the favours which they received: the same conduct will be used towards private persons. The knowledge of God's law is a blessing for which we ought to return him the greatest thanks; and yet, if we make not a good use of this blessing, it becomes the occasion of a more dreadful vengeance. The more light and knowledge we have received, the more ought we to fear and to humble ourselves; because, without a grace of heart and will, our will, left to itself, will certainly abuse this knowledge.

" 15. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell."

The higher sinners are exalted in this world, the lower shall they be thrust down and humbled in hell. A state of great elevation is a very dangerous one; because the falls from thence are seldom very light. That is a very blind joy, which proceeds from seeing ourselves, our relations, or our friends, advanced to

high stations or great power. The fear of falling from them, which arises from an irregular love of grandeur and advancement itself, is the fear of reprobates: but the fear of keeping them to the day of our death, even though God should call upon us to forsake them, and of falling from thence into an eternal abyss of misery, is the fear of a Christian, who loves his salvation above every thing, and sees the danger of being lost, in a state wherein there is so much opposition to the humility of the gospel.

“ 16. He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.”

How extremely dangerous is it, not to hear those who speak to us on the part of God, and not to obey the pastors who conduct us in his name! It is one and the same truth, which is in the Father by his essence, in the Son by his eternal generation, in the apostles by divine, and in the bishops by apostolical tradition. So long as this trust is kept inviolable; in hearing these, we hear the Father and the Son. The pastoral authority, which, as well as the truth, has God himself for its fountain, is communicated to the Son by the mission of his Father, that is, by his incarnation; to the apostles, by the mission of the Son; and to the bishops, by succession: an authority always venerable, how contemptible soever the life may be which frequently accompanies it.

SECT. II.—*The Return of the Disciples. Names written in heaven. Mysteries hid from the wise.*

“ 17. ¶ And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.”

It is a thing very extraordinary, for men not to take too much complacency in the success of those works which God performs by their hands. The apostles themselves are not proof against it. Every state of superiority is dangerous for those, who have from Adam inherited a desire to distinguish themselves from others, and to bear rule. One is ready enough to own, that all success is the gift of God: but the delight and complacency one is apt to take in having this gift preferably to others, and the joy of being taken notice of by men on this account, are deplorable effects of self-love.

“ 18. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.”

What dreadful fall is this! but how common is it in the church? How many angels, on the account of their ministry, of the purity of their life, and of the eminency of their grace, fall from heaven by their infidelity? and we tremble not! God knows how to make us find sufficient cause of humiliation, in those very things from which we take occasion to be puffed up. If grace is not in a state of security in heaven in an angel; who will not tremble upon earth, since he carries this treasure in so weak a vessel?

“ 19. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you.”

God has given to his church power and authority over every thing which may be hurtful to man. She has not lost the right to this power, though the exercise of it be now very uncommon. Her benedictions, &c. are founded upon this declaration of the Son

of God, which is, as it were, her title. The prayers of the church are a sort of public archives, in which her titles and powers are kept: and the abuse which may be made of them, cannot do them any prejudice. The want of piety, and the negligence of ministers, and the want of faith in Christians, hinder the effects of this power. It is the shame of some of the sons and daughters of the church, that they choose rather to put their trust in superstitious and ineffectual means, than to have recourse with faith to that power which Christ here gave unto her.

“ 20. Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”

Let us not rejoice in the great and extraordinary gifts of God, but only in his mercy towards us. That which may be in common both to good and bad, and which was given to Judas as well as to the other apostles, is not a proper subject of our joy. It is but a small matter for us to deliver the bodies of others from the power of the evil spirit, if he remain master of our heart by means of our passions. When the love of God is written in our hearts by his Spirit, and in our hands by good works, we ought then to have this confidence, that our names are written in heaven, as heirs of eternal life.

“ 21. ¶ In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

Let us follow the inclinations of Christ’s heart; let us make that our joy which is his. Let us re-

joice with him at the contemplation of the designs of his Father in relation to mankind. Let us adore what he adores: these mysteries hidden from the wise and prudent; this conduct which is so adorable, and adored by Christ himself. Nothing is worthy of our joy any more than of his, but that only which makes known to us the destruction of the kingdom of the devil, and the advancement of the kingdom of God in his church. It was the consolation of our blessed Saviour, amidst his afflictions, and upon the prospect of his sufferings and death, to converse with his Father upon the subject of his designs towards his elect; for whom are all things, and who are the fruit of his sacrifice. Every thing relating to this subject is worthy of the joy, adoration, acknowledgement, and contemplation of the Son of God, particularly the magnificence of his gracious designs, the election of those in whom he intends to accomplish them, and the means he employs to that end, though to the eyes of men they seem but weakness, meanness, and folly. Nothing is more worthy of the majesty of God, than to raise a mere nothing up to himself, and to do it by the abasement of the Creator, and the humiliation of the creature after his example.

“ 22. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.”

Observe here, power, knowledge, and love, (for in God to will is to love): the three principles which produced the church, and every thing which contributes to the framing of it, namely, authority, truth,

and charity. They are, as it were, divided in God by his personal properties, re-united in Christ by the incarnation, and communicated to the church. The Son alone, from all eternity, receives the authority of the Father by a generation, the principle whereof is the truth subsisting, and productive of the consubstantial love of the Father and the Son, which is the Holy Ghost. All things are delivered to Christ by his incarnation and temporal mission; for God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and communicated himself, and wrought by Jesus Christ, according to these three properties, which the Christian religion represents, adores, and imitates. Every thing therefore ought to pay homage thereto. Every hierarchical action in the pastors, ought to be an act of authority, truth, and charity. Every Christian action in the faithful, an act of homage and obedience to the authority, truth, and love of God, and such as has nothing in it contrary to them. Every thing is performed in the church in the way of paternal and pastoral authority; in the way of knowledge revealed, of truth taught, and of the word preached by a particular mission; and in the way of love inspired, of grace freely dispensed, and of ministries, distributed according to the will and call of the divine Spirit, and received with submission, adoration, and gratitude, towards the adorable Trinity, and the personal properties thereof.

“ 23. ¶ And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see :”

Blessed is that person, who, with Christian eyes, with the eyes of faith, sees that which the Jews saw

only with carnal eyes, namely, the Mediator and way of our salvation, the victim of our reconciliation, the author and finisher of our faith, and the principle of all grace, of all perfect love, and of every good thing in us. Take from me, O Lord, those eyes which, seeing, see not. Give me the eyes of the heart, which, in seeing, love, obey, and imitate thee, and are continually fixed upon thee, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters.

“ 24. For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”

What have we done for God to deserve this preference? He prevented all our desires, by giving himself to us (before ever we could so much as think of him) in giving us his Son, of whom the prophets, kings, and patriarchs, saw nothing but the types and shadows. O beneficial gift to every one who makes use of it to promote his own salvation, by taking him for the rule of his life, imitating him as his pattern, having recourse to him by humble and persevering prayer, and depending upon him in all things! But a very fatal gift to every one who makes no use at all of it! If it were a happiness to see Jesus Christ in the infirmity and humility of his flesh; what a happiness must it be to see him in his glory, to possess him in eternity, to live his life, to be transported with his joy, inebriated, as it were, with his pleasures, and blessed with his very felicity!

SECT. III.—*The Love of God and of our Neighbour.*

“ 25. ¶ And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

How many times have we, like this lawyer, tempted God in prayer ! We often beg of him to instruct us in his will, as if we really intended to do it, whilst, at the same time, we neglect to do that which we know of it already. There are but too many, who place the best part of their devotion in asking questions, and hearing a spiritual guide or director, concerning those things which they sufficiently understand ; and who waste both his time and their own in such discourses as are of little or no advantage at all. The gospel would save them abundance of this trouble, if they would but therein sincerely consult the truth itself, and practise that which they know.

“ 26. He said unto him, What is written in the law ? how readest thou ?”

Jesus Christ himself refers us to the law of God, though he was truth itself, and could give such holy instructions. In vain do we seek after other lights and ways besides those which we find there. It is the Spirit of God which dictated the law, and made it the rule of our life : it is injurious to him, for us either not to study it, or to prefer the thoughts of men before it. The first question which will be put to a Christian at the tribunal of God, will be to this effect, ‘ What is written in the law ? What have you read in the gospel ? What use have you made thereof ?’ What answer can that person return, who

has not so much as read it, though he has had sufficient ability and opportunity to do it?

“27. And he, answering, said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”

Our heart and our time ought not to be divided in the love of God. Whatever is in man, and belongs to him, ought to be referred ultimately thereto. We must love our neighbour, as we love ourselves, when we love God and ourselves only for God’s sake. Christ does not command the love of our neighbour, till after he has commanded and explained the love of God, without which the rule which he gives would be false. If the love of God be not the prevailing principle and motive, in the use we make of our mind, our will, our senses, talents, health, strength, &c. we are deficient in the observation of this precept.

“28. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”

Do this in me, O Lord, and then I shall do it; cause me to live, and I shall live: for without thee I can do nothing, (John xv. 5.); and it belongs to thee to make me perfect in every good work, doing in me thyself that which cannot be well-pleasing in thy Father’s sight but through thee alone: (Heb. xiii. 21.) To live without charity is not properly living; and charity itself does not live long without good works. True piety does not consist in knowledge, but in practice; and that knowledge of which we make no use, will serve only to our condemnation.

“ 29. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”

The more a sinner endeavours to justify himself before God, the more he condemns himself. A man must be very vainly puffed up with learning, not to know who is his neighbour; for he who knows not this, knows nothing of charity. My God, how much is learning to be dreaded, when charity does not render it useful, edifying, holy, religious, mindful of Christ, who is our chief neighbour, of the church as his spouse, and of our brethren as his members.

SECT. IV.—*The Parable of the Samaritan.*

“ 30. And Jesus, answering, said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”

This man, fallen among thieves, is an emblem of the deplorable condition of a sinner, who, having withdrawn himself from being under the hand of God, and from his dependence on him, is fallen into that of the devil, has lost the state of original innocence, and is banished from the heavenly Jerusalem, sinking gradually every day into the lowest abyss of misery, being stripped of righteousness, grace, immortality, and of all the gifts of God, covered with the wounds of sin and concupiscence, full of ignorance and infirmity, unable to do any good, capable of all evil, and having no longer any thing left but only hope in Jesus Christ and in his grace, which keeps him from being altogether dead, and past recovery, as the rebellious angels are.

“ 31. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way ; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.”

Neither Moses nor Aaron, neither the priests nor the saints of the natural law, neither the patriarchs nor the prophets, were able to repair lost man. They saw and felt the wounds of sin, but could not heal them ; and they passed their whole life without seeing the salvation of the world, except only in hope. No, my Saviour, there is no man like myself who can give me the least relief : thou alone, O God-man, art my only refuge.

“ 32. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.”

Let us observe and acknowledge in this Levite, the inability of the law, and of the ancient sacrifices, to expiate the guilt, or to heal the wound of sin. The law makes it known by forbidding it ; and by this very means is an occasion of exciting and increasing it ; so far is it from weakening it or stopping its course. The whole time of the law passed away, without making any thing but transgressors of the law of all those in whom the grace of Christ did not act before-hand, and by way of anticipation.

“ 33. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was ; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,”

Jesus Christ, the true Samaritan, a stranger to us before the incarnation, separate from sinners, and journeying, as it were, among us by becoming man, vouchsafed to look upon sinful man, grovelling on the earth, and wounded in every part. O Saviour

and Guardian of my soul, cease not to cast thy eyes upon it, to observe its wounds, and to have compassion on its miseries !

“ 34. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”

The Son of God unites to, and takes upon himself the sinner and his sins, in order to cure them ; pours into his wounded heart his healing, smooth, strong, and delicious grace, binds up his wounds with the bands of his commandments, and brings him into his church. No merit or desert of ours drew down upon us the assistance of our blessed Saviour, to whom we were strangers, and even enemies, when he undertook to save us. Teach us, Lord, to do good indifferently to every body, and to do it gently and efficaciously, without sparing any thing which may be serviceable either to the body or the soul.

“ 35. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him : and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. 36. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves ?”

Happy is that man whom God brings off from the highway where he was wounded, and places in the inn, namely, in the church on earth, where we remain as travellers and strangers till we are perfectly cured. It is in this house of unity that God has left the two pence of truth and charity, to be employed by his ministers towards the salvation of souls until

his return. The church is the house of salvation; out of it there is no grace, no cure, no life. The labours of faithful ministers will certainly be rewarded by Christ, provided they have laboured by his appointment, for his sake, and by his Spirit. It is till the time of his coming again, that is, till the last judgment, that this reward is reserved.

“ 37. And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

Our neighbour is he who stands in need of our assistance, let him be what he will. Blood, interest, friendship, inclination, or vain generosity, are but private and selfish motives: the common ties of nature, and those of grace, are the things which ought to give us a common satisfaction or concern for the happiness or misery of other men. Mercy is a natural debt, not a service which is arbitrary and left to our own discretion. The being miserable is sufficient to give a man a right to the mercy of his neighbour.

SECT. V.—*Martha and Mary. The One Thing necessary.*

“ 38. ¶ Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman, named Martha, received him into her house. 39. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.”

Martha is the emblem of an active life, busied about things relating to our neighbour, through the necessity of charity; and Mary her sister is that of a contemplative life, which is intent only on God,

through the love of truth. These two kinds of life ought to be united, like two sisters, in a Christian. It is the lot and portion of a son or daughter of the church, to hear Jesus Christ in prayer, and in reading his word, with silence, humility, peace of mind, assiduity, disengagement from all business, and with a holy eagerness of desire. Happy portion this, for persons to pass their life at Jesus' feet, when God does not call them to any other employment !

“ 40. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone ? bid her therefore that she help me.”

Happy is the house wherein Martha calls Mary to her assistance, and where prayer and love of retirement sanctify labour and external occupations ! It would be a very great misfortune and disorder indeed, if Mary should envy Martha ; if one should prefer the noise and hurry of business, before the quietness of silence and solitude, of prayer and attendance upon God. It is a very considerable grace for a man to be sensible of the weight and danger of outward employments, and upon this consideration to complain of them before God without envying the grace of another. Though our labour have God, Christ, and the church for its end, yet it is apt to distract and dry up the heart, and to cause murmuring, when it is not undertaken in the spirit of mortification and submission to the will of God. Martha does well in calling Mary to her assistance : prayer ought to support labour. It is common for ministers who are truly the servants of God, to complain of the difficulty of recollecting themselves, and that they find their minds subject to distractions in prayer.

“ 41. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things;”

The more active our temper is, the more watchful ought we to be over ourselves, even in the employments of charity, lest we be troubled and distracted thereby. We must avoid hurry and eagerness in acting: this generally proceeds from that great desire which men have of success, which is always seeking to satisfy itself, to avoid blame, and to acquire praise by satisfying others. That activity which the Spirit of God inspires, is quiet and peaceable, because it submits itself to God, and desires nothing but his will. Trouble proceeds from hence, that we would willingly do more, or in another manner, than we are able, and that we would fain distinguish ourselves.

“ 42. But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

The one thing needful is to live for God. That which regards only the life of the body and the present world, is not absolutely necessary; since it is, on the contrary, necessary for us to wean ourselves from them both, and sometimes even to sacrifice the former. Nothing is necessary but what is either eternal, or leads to eternity. Martha’s employment is good; but that of Mary is better, because she begins here below that which she is to do in heaven. Deliver us, O Lord, from those necessities which proceed only from concupiscence, and likewise from every thing which stifles the spirit of prayer, withdraws us from the presence of God, and hinders us from following that which alone is truly necessary.

CHAPTER XI.

SECT. I.—*The Lord's Prayer.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

By this example we may understand how profitable and edifying public prayer is in the church, or in common in families. God often affixes great blessings to a good example: this is a debt which is owing from masters of families, and from all superiors, to those who are under their care, or have any dependence upon them. Pastors are obliged, in relation to prayer, to give not only example, but also instruction, in imitation of Jesus Christ and St. John. One single person, being moved and edified by this good example of our Lord, conceives a love for prayer, desires to know how to pray, is sensible that of himself he is not capable of doing it, addresses himself to Christ, obtains from him this divine pattern, procures this treasure for the rest of the disciples and for the whole church, and becomes the occasion of the infinite good which this prayer has produced, and will produce therein to the end of the world. A person must needs have prayed very much himself, to be able to teach others to pray. It belongs properly to none but the God-man to teach how God would be prayed to by man.

“ 2. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”

The Lord's Prayer is an abridgment of religion, and contains the object and duties thereof. The order of the petitions shows the order of our desires; and the order of our desires that of our love, in which the true worship of God does consist. God, who is Father of the eternal truth, and, together with his Son, the principle from whence the Holy Ghost proceeds, will be served by children, not by slaves, will be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and sought after for the sake of himself, and for the sanctification of his name. The first motive, then, of our actions, and the first desire of our heart, is the glory of God in this world by the reign of grace, and the sanctification of souls.

“ — Thy kingdom come.”

The second motive of our actions and desire of our heart is, the coming of the kingdom of God by his glory, which will be the perfection of the divine adoption, the fulness of the knowledge of God and Christ, the consummation of holiness and charity, the perfect establishment of the kingdom of God by the union of all the elect to their Head, and by completing the whole mystical body in God to all eternity.

“ — Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

3. Give us day by day our daily bread.”

The third motive of our actions and desire of our heart ought to be, that of our own sanctification and of the assistance of God. Grace is the bread of a Christian, as glory is his patrimony; and he ought to esteem, desire, and pray for grace, in the same proportion that he desires the glory to which it leads. The bread of the body and of the soul is whatever is necessary to the nourishment of both. A poor tra-

veller begs his bread every day, and eats only to strengthen himself for his journey. Let us also, like travellers, beg ours, and let us hasten towards the country where we shall be filled with the bread of God, without having any occasion to ask for it.

“ 4. And forgive us our sins : for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.”

The fourth motive of our actions and desire of our heart is, that of the forgiveness of our sins, and of the mercy of God. It is not sufficient for a traveller to have his provisions ready, and to be plentifully fed : he must remove all impediments which may either stop or retard his journey, he must pay his debts, finish all his suits at law, and agree with all his adversaries. It is easy for a good Christian to do all this. Charity alone does it for him, if he has but that in his heart : and if he has it not, let him not cease to seek and beg it of him, who never fails to give it to every one who asks it as he ought.

“ — And lead us not into temptation ; but deliver us from evil.”

The fifth and last motive of our actions and desire of our heart is, that of perseverance in the love of God above all things. Let us always remember, that we travel in a country where every place is full of enemies and of great dangers. A traveller is generally afraid of those who may rob him of his money. How comes it to pass then, that a Christian is under so little apprehension of losing grace, which is his whole treasure and subsistence ? This alone renders him unworthy to preserve and keep it. So far as we esteem and know the value of it, so far are we careful to watch and pray, lest it should be

taken away from us by temptation. To pray, not to be led into temptation, is to pray for the gift of perseverance. And how careful ought we to be in endeavouring to obtain a gift, upon which our eternal happiness depends, and which we deserve so much the less to receive, the more we are persuaded that we do deserve it, and the less solicitous we are to obtain it? Lord, I expect it from thy pure mercy alone. I do not ask, not to be tempted at all, but that I may meet with the temptations only of thy elect, which serve to increase their love towards thee, and cause them to cleave unto thee with the greater steadfastness.

SECT. II.—*Three Loaves borrowed. Ask, seek, knock.*

“ 5. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;”

How great is the advantage and privilege of a Christian, who prays, not to a friend, but to a Father, and a Father who does not wait for our soliciting him, but presses us himself to ask him; who has no difficult moments or unseasonable hours, but whom we find ready at all times, not barely to lend, but even to give, and that not only more than we deserve, but more than we ask, or could presume to ask. The bread of the mind is truth; the bread of the heart is to do the will of God; the bread of the whole man is Jesus Christ and his grace: give us, Lord, these three, and never cease to give them.

“ 6. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?”

The friend whom we ought to love most is our soul : it is in a journey from the very time that it is united to the body, and comes into the world : and it finds here nothing but poverty, indigence, and infirmity. It is to thee, O my God, that I have recourse in behalf of my soul ; for I have nothing to set before it. Thou hast been pleased to give it the life of faith, vouchsafe likewise to nourish it with hope, and to strengthen and support it by charity.

“ 7. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not : the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed ; I cannot rise and give thee.”

The importunity and violence which we use towards God in prayer are very grateful to him ; or rather, we never properly offer any violence at all to him, but when we force him to refuse us, by rendering ourselves unworthy to receive his gifts. The door of his mercy is always open during this life. He, from within his house, which is heaven, hears those who pray on earth. The supreme rest and happiness which he enjoys in himself with his saints, does not make him insensible to our pains and miseries : and he need not quit the least part of that happiness in order to assist and relieve us. Rise, Lord, and behold the weariness, hunger, and wants of this poor traveller.

“ 8. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.”

Perseverance in prayer obtains every thing. The odd conduct and irregular behaviour of worldly people, serve for the instruction of the righteous, to whom

charity makes every thing useful and advantageous. Man is hard-hearted even to his friends, when it must cost him something to assist them; because, most commonly, it is only either his own satisfaction, or his interest, which he loves in them. God does good to all, because he is goodness itself, because he communicates his good things without diminishing them, because he works in all things without being wearied, and because he loves without the least interest.

“ 9. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

A man, in order to offer up a good prayer, must ask with the humility of a beggar, he must seek with the carefulness of a good servant, and he must knock with the confidence of a friend. It is either through pride, hard-heartedness, or want of power, that men suffer themselves to be importuned by others, and make them wait for their gifts so long: God does it out of kindness, wisdom, and love, and in order to the more plentiful effusion of his gifts and mercies; since he himself engages to form in us the piety, perseverance, and other dispositions of prayer, and to proportion thereto the magnificence of his gifts, and the abundance of his graces.

“ 10. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”

It is by charity that we must ask, seek, and knock: it is by this that we obtain every thing: it is by this that we make a good and persevering use of any gift already received. When we do not receive that

which we ask, let us always believe, either that we do not ask it as we ought, or that it is good for us not to receive it. We must receive refusals from God as gifts, with adoration and thanksgiving; because it is really a great gift for us not to receive that which he foresees we would abuse, and the abuse of which would incense his wrath against us.

“ 11. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?”

Let us never fear that God will give us a stone instead of bread; but let us fear lest we ourselves should change the bread of God into stone, by the hardness of our own heart. Whoever receives the sacrament without profit, and eats and drinks the representative body and blood of Christ without being nourished by them; he changes the bread of heaven into a stone. Judas received them into his mouth, and the serpent entered into his heart, because he received them with the heart of a serpent.

“ 12. Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?”

What ought we not then to expect from so good a Father as God is in relation to us? And how can his gifts possibly do us any hurt, so long as we take care to keep our heart sound and good? The Scripture may be compared to an egg, which we must open, in order to discover the truths of religion therein contained; and on which a good heart feeds, taking it with the salt of wisdom and discretion. Heretics and libertines find therein that which poisons them, because they have the heart of a scorpion.

“ 13. If ye then, being evil, know how to give

good gifts unto your children ; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy * Spirit to them that ask him ?” [* *Fr. Good.*]

It is the goodness of God which is the fountain of all his gifts. The good Spirit is the Spirit of love, which God urges us to ask of him. This is the only gift which in itself is worthy of God, and of those to whom he has already vouchsafed to give his Son. There is nothing which we ought to ask more frequently and earnestly than this ; and yet there is nothing which is by the generality of persons asked more seldom and with greater indifference. It is a shame to Christians, that their vows, devotions, &c. have almost all of them no other end, but health, the gaining of a suit at law, or some other temporal advantage. We are very ready to ask for good success in our affairs ; but we seldom ask for that good Spirit, which makes even the worst affairs beneficial and advantageous to us, through the good use which it causes us to make of them.

SECT. III.—*The dumb devil. The blasphemy of the Jews. A divided kingdom.*

“ 14. ¶ And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake ; and the people wondered.”

The devil shuts up the mouth of those whom he hinders from praising God, from praying to him, from confessing their sins, from bearing witness to truth and innocence, or from giving admonition, instruction, and comfort, to those who need them, and to whom they are due. The mouth is generally shut with respect to all these duties, only because the

heart is shut towards God, and open to temporal interests, and to human fears and motives. Lord, it belongs to thy Spirit to cast out this dumb devil. Thou hast the key of David; and if thou dost but vouchsafe to open the heart and the mouth, no man is able to shut them.

“ 15. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.”

That which proceeds from the Spirit of God, is every day ascribed to the evil spirit, by the rash judgments of men. Two spirits so contrary to each other, have likewise ways as directly contrary. The Spirit of God inclines men to excuse even bad actions as much as possible, by the uprightness of the intention: the evil spirit endeavours to decry the very best, condemning either the intention or the means. We ought to be forced by the plainest evidence to condemn our neighbour; and we often condemn him contrary to all evidence.

“ 16. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.”

Infidelity has never sufficient arguments for conviction. Faith, though wise and discreet, having likewise humility and sincerity, is satisfied with such as God is pleased to use. To one who has a sincere faith, it is enough that God has once declared himself. He who is not content with this, wants faith, not proofs. Lord, I do not ask of thee new signs or miracles: thou art thyself the greatest of all. Faith is that which is necessary for me, this is the thing which I ask of thee.

“ 17. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought

to desolation ; and a house divided against a house falleth."

How much ought we to love unity, without which nothing can subsist, since it is one of the properties and marks of God's works, and above all of his church ! Every communion which separates itself from this church, is no other than a house divided against itself, which will certainly fall. The church alone, founded upon a rock, is preserved in the midst, and against all the assaults, of schismatical churches, or of false religions, which all conspire its destruction.

" 18. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand ? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub."

There can be no concord betwixt Christ and Belial. It is a foolish and senseless calumny, to endeavour to make it believed, that a man is an enemy of the church, when he is wholly intent on establishing truth of doctrine and holiness of manners therein, and on casting out of it the devils of error and sin. We must therefore, following the example of Christ, not cease to serve the church, in the midst of all the calumnies and oppositions of false brethren.

" 19. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out ? therefore shall they be your judges."

The corruption of the heart is the cause of the corruption of the understanding and judgment. Passion makes men frequently condemn that in some which they approve in others. As nothing is so common as these personal errors and heresies ; so nothing is more criminal, than to employ these means to render those whom we do not love odious to the world.

“ 20. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.”

Wherever the reign of the devil and of self-love ceases, there God and charity must needs reign. We cannot be assured that God reigns in a soul, but only when the devils which possessed it, that is, its lusts and evil habits, are cast out, not by other devils or lusts, but by the love of righteousness and the hatred of sin; which is done by the finger of God, namely, by his Holy Spirit.

SECT. IV.—*The strong Man armed. The Devil re-entering.*

“ 21. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace :”

The world and the sinner are the habitation of the devil, until Christ take possession of them by his incarnation and grace. We are all born under the dominion of this strong person armed; and have all been his house and his possession, by being born slaves to sin. Would to God we had never been so by our own will, and that we had not given ourselves to him more than once ! We cannot have too frequent occasions of humbling ourselves on this account; and all the truths which have any relation to this matter, put us in mind of doing it.

“ 22. But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.”

Blessed be thou, O my God, for that thou hast not left this enemy in possession of my heart, but

hast been pleased to re-enter upon thy rights, and to reinstate thyself therein, by overcoming in me concupiscence by a stronger charity. Without concupiscence, the devil has no power : that is the thing wherein he places his whole strength and confidence. Christ takes from him all his armour, whenever he roots out of the heart the love of pleasures, the desire of riches, and the pride of life.

“ 23. He that is not with me is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.”

Indifference is a crime in a pastor and minister of the church, who is a man of God, obliged by his profession to have the interests of Christ and of his spouse at heart. In vain does he flatter himself that he does no evil, if so be that he do no good. He disperses the flock of God, if he is not diligent in seeking and bringing home the sheep which are gone astray, in securing those which are in the fold, and in feeding, strengthening, and curing them. That person scatters, who does not gather with Jesus Christ, in the unity of his body, in his Spirit, and by his grace.

“ 24. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest ; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out.”

The rage of the devil against those who are returned to God, is greater than we can imagine. We have but little knowledge of this enemy of our salvation, if we suffer ourselves to grow careless after having been delivered from his yoke. No person has greater reason to be afraid of his assaults and snares, than one who has vanquished him, if the vic-

tory either puff him up, or render him less vigilant. A converted sinner is a place which the devil has lost, the weak sides and avenues whereof he perfectly knows, and in which he very often keeps a correspondence.

“ 25. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.”

Nothing is more likely to recall the devil into a reconciled sinner, than for him either not to confirm and secure his reconciliation by good works, or to have only the outward part of them, or to take great complacency and satisfaction in them as in his own proper righteousness. Such a soul seems to be swept and garnished on purpose to invite the devil back again.

“ 26. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

How dangerous are relapses ! If the Jews, delivered from their bondage in Egypt, and become the people of God by the covenant of the law, fell into a state much worse than their first, by the abuse of that covenant, and by rejecting Jesus Christ—Good God ! what is the last state of a Christian, who falls from the divine adoption, by losing the grace of his baptism, by trampling under foot the blood of Christ, and obliging his Holy Spirit to withdraw from him, and give place to the evil spirit !

SECT. V.—*The blessedness of the Mother of Christ.
The Queen of the South. The Ninevites.*

“ 27. ¶ And it came to pass, as he spake these

things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked!"

The holy Virgin is not blessed in having born Christ, on any other account, but only because he, being much more than the holiest of saints, made her worthy to be his mother by sanctifying her. The virtue of children is the glory of those who gave them birth and good education.

" 28. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

Christ does not blame the praise here given to his mother, but he completes and perfects it, by intimating, that her blessedness proceeded from having borne the Son of God in her heart, even before she bare him in her womb; and from her having been nourished herself with the milk of the word and will of his Father, even before she nourished his Son with her own milk. Let us imitate Jesus Christ, who always prefers those who belong to him according to the Spirit, before those who belong to him according to the flesh. Blessed is that person who hears the word and keeps it!

" 29. ¶ And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet."

Nothing shows more clearly the hardness and corruption of these hearts, than their asking a new miracle, counting, it seems, all those as nothing which they had seen before. Their incredulity with respect to that which he promised, and which he gave them in his resurrection, ought fully to convince man, that

the most entraordinary are capable only of hardening the heart the more, unless God change it by an inward miracle of his grace, and render it attentive to the voice of external miracles. My God, this is the miracle which I ask of thee:—grant that I may not have the heart of a Jew, in relation either to all those which thou hast wrought for me, or to all those which I have every day before the eyes of my flesh and of my faith!

“ 30. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.”

The resurrection of Christ was the last of his miracles for the Jews, and filled up the measure of their impenitency. It was the first for the Gentiles—the signal that they should be called to repentance, and the cause and pattern of their conversion, prefigured by that of the heathen Ninevites. Let thy resurrection, O Jesus, be truly to me, both the end of my falling, and the beginning of a new life. The mysteries of Christ, which to those who have faith are sources of grace, become to proud and incredulous hearts occasions of their falling and being hardened in sin.

“ 31. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

Unbelieving Christians will be condemned even by infidels. What pains do people take to satisfy their curiosity, and perhaps only to see a man? Would they do as much in order to their own salvation, and to know Jesus Christ? This example will

confound those Christians at the day of judgment, who have not vouchsafed to open the New Testament, that they might hear the incarnate Wisdom speaking therein, and learn from his mouth the words of eternal life. We have no occasion to cross the seas, or to go far to hear him: we need only hearken to the church diffused every where, which is the mouth of the true Solomon. My God, how great is the comfort, when, at the foot of the gospel, our faith tells us, “Behold, a greater than Solomon is here!” This is he who possesses and gives true wisdom.

“32. The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”

Graces not received as they ought, and the abuse of the divine benefits, harden the heart. What a repentance was this, at the preaching of a person unknown, of a different nation and religion, and working no miracles, and this only to avoid temporal evils! Where is that of the generality of Christians, though instructed by the Son of God himself, and by which they are to deliver themselves from an eternity of torments, and to gain heaven? Let us not wait till the last day, either of the world or of our life, ere we make this comparison, and understand what we owe to Christ and to our own souls.

SECT. VI.—*The Candle on a Candlestick. The Single Eye.*

“33. No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel,

but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light."

The truths of the gospel are not to be concealed, nor held captive in unrighteousness: but the people are to be instructed in them. The Scripture, and particularly the gospel, is our candle. It is the Spirit of God which has lighted and placed it on the candlestick of the church, that the light of it might be seen by all the faithful. To forbid Christians the reading of the Scripture, is to forbid the use of light to the children of light, and to make them suffer a sort of excommunication. Thou, O Lord, wast pleased to invite every body to hear thee, and didst expressly forbid thy apostles to hinder little ones from coming to thee: do not permit me then to be hindered from hearing thee in thy gospel, which is to me instead of thy visible presence; nor suffer this candle to be put under a bushel, or in a secret place.

"34. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness."

The single eye is an upright, pure, and Christian intention. It is a great misfortune for a Christian, and much more for a clergyman, to have either false lights and prejudices in his mind, or corrupt passions and intentions: all his designs, his judgments, and the whole conduct of his life, are generally infected thereby. This was that which made the Jews judge so ill of Christ and reject him: and it is this which makes Christians judge so ill of their brethren, and set themselves against them without any foundation.

“35. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.”

An irregular intention corrupts the whole action : a false light causes a man to fall into abundance of faults. It is one of the most dangerous, for us to be unwilling to examine, according to Christ’s direction, whether that by which we are led be not rather darkness than light. It is an inexhaustible spring of rash judgments, divisions, and sins, for men to adhere inflexibly to their own prepossessions, and to resolve no more to hear, nor receive any instruction, than if they were infallible.

“36. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.”

When a man’s heart and inclinations tend to God, and he walks toward him following a sure guide, such as is the gospel or the church, he has peace in his heart, and walks as in a way of light. Every thing which moves the heart must be very right and pure; the least irregular aim, the least dark intention, is capable of spreading great darkness over the whole conduct and behaviour.

SECT. VII.—*The Outside of the Cup. Neglect of Charity.*

“37. ¶ And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.”

It is necessary to converse familiarly with sinners, in order to gain them to God ; but it must be done with prudence and circumspection. A minister of

God ought not to eat at the table of others, either often, or of his own accord. He may sometimes yield to importunity, and to considerations of usefulness, decency, or charity: but never to his own inclination, or to the desire of good cheer.

“38. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.”

This Pharisee, by immediately showing his Pharisiasm, discovers the reason which brought the Son of God to his house: it was more to instruct than to be entertained. It is easy to pass from the practice of some external action to a fondness for it, from fondness to superstition, from superstition to a condemnation of those who do not practise it, from a condemnation to a contempt of them, and from a contempt to an open schism and separation.”

“39. And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.”

Christ here teaches his ministers not to be parasites, who purchase their good meals at the expense of truth. He does not speak the language of one who has sold his liberty, or who is lavish of his commendations out of interest. My God! who can say that he is entirely free from this Pharisaical hypocrisy? Where is that person to be found, who, by the inward purity of the motions of his heart, takes as much care not to offend the eyes of God, as he does not to displease men by his outward behaviour?

“40. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?”

This apparent severity of expression is often use-

ful and even necessary to awaken the sinner, and to give him a more lively sense of his faults. There are no sinners whatever, who think themselves wiser, or more applaud their own actions, than hypocrites do ; and it is for this very reason that our blessed Lord exposes the folly of their conduct. Nothing is more foolish, than to pretend to be devout by a grave and serious appearance ; to endeavour to please men, who cannot possibly make us happy ; and not to be at all solicitous to please God, upon whom our happiness depends ; to bestow all our care on the outside, not considering that it is in mind and heart that we are made after the image of God, and that, without giving him these, it is not possible to please him.

“ 41. But rather give alms of such things as you have ; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.”

He who has pity on the poor shall be saved, provided he have likewise pity on his own soul, in rendering himself acceptable to God. Is, then, the promise of the forgiveness of our sins so small a thing, that we neglect to purchase it with alms ? Hypocrisy and avarice, when joined together, are almost incurable. In beginning to oppose covetousness by giving alms, we weaken hypocrisy ; because the latter is oftentimes only an effect of the former, and because God shows mercy to those who themselves show it to others.

SECT. VIII.—*Woes pronounced against the Pharisees, Scribes, and Lawyers.*

“ 42. But woe unto you, Pharisees ! for ye tithe mint and rue, and all manner of herbs, and pass over

judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

Observe here the several marks and characters of the devotion of the Pharisees, and of all those who act by their spirit. First, They are very exact in trifles, in order to gain reputation and credit; but they destroy the commandment concerning the love of God, to flatter the desires of the world, of whose favour they are extremely fond. It ought to be the chief care of a pastor, to establish religion in the heart by the love of God, which worships him in spirit and in truth, and by the love of our neighbour, which includes in it judgment or justice. External performances are but the outside of these things.

"43. Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets."

The second character of the imitators of the Pharisees is, that they seek to be the first or chief in the church, to teach and preach in the chief pulpits, and to be honoured by the people. Pride does not consist in being the first or chiefest, but in loving the esteem and distinction which attend upon the first place, and seeking the advantages which accompany it. It is a misfortune to be exposed to them, because it is very rare not to be corrupted by them.

"44. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them."

The third mark or character of these imitators is, that they hide their corrupt maxims under an external piety and a false charity. It is a dreadful judg-

ment on hypocrites, when God suffers them to conceal their corruption according to their heart's desire: their being exposed to public shame, would be a step toward their conversion. It is the same in proportion, with respect to the lesser instances of hypocrisy, and feigned humiliations, from which few are altogether exempt.

"45. Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also."

The fourth character of hypocrites is, that they think themselves incapable of committing faults, that they cannot bear being reproved for them, and that they are no farther concerned at the disgrace of others than as it falls upon themselves. We see two very contrary affections in the proud. The fear of being despised, persuades them that they are taxed whenever we reprove the faults of others; and the esteem they have of themselves, makes them believe that our discourse is never directed to them, when we exhort to the practice of virtue.

"46. And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers."

The fifth mark or character of the imitators of the Pharisees is, that they observe no part of that themselves to which they oblige others; and that they indiscreetly load them with the burden of many unprofitable performances, without concerning themselves whether their heart is devoted to God. True charity is compassionate, willing to take upon itself the burden of others, and far from laying upon them

one which is too grievous to be borne: whereas hypocrites aim at nothing, but gaining to themselves honour from the austeries which they impose upon others, without consulting their strength.

“47. Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.”

The sixth character of hypocrites is, that they spare nothing to persuade the world that they honour those who have laid down their lives for the truth, and that they condemn their persecutors, though they themselves persecute the truth and those who preach it. Those persons who inherit the vices of their fathers, can never sincerely condemn their crimes.

“48. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.”

Seventhly, Hypocrites imitate the wicked who are gone before them. Cruel as their fathers, they are continually hatching mischievous designs in their hearts against the servants of God living in their own age, and, at the same time, make a show of honouring the saints of ages past.

“49. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute:”

In the eighth place, they make no scruple to destroy or ruin those who contradict them no otherwise than by opposing their passions in teaching them the truth. The wisdom of God must needs draw abundance of glory from the fidelity of a minister, who gives up his life rather than renounce the truth, or be wanting to his ministry; since, in order to make way for it, he permits so great a crime, even foreseeing it.

“ 50. That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation ;”

The ninth mark or character of hypocrites is, that they draw down the curse of God upon a whole people, by engaging them in their passions. The blood of the prophets, that is, the injustice and violence done to the ministers of the Lord, is that which generally fills up the measure of iniquity, and brings down utter desolation upon states and kingdoms. Other sins are punished in private persons : God revenges these as injuries done to himself, after a most dreadful manner, and by the ruin and desolation of whole nations.

“ 51. From the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple : verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.”

The tenth character of hypocrites is, that they flatter themselves with the hopes of impunity : but the justice of God will certainly punish them, all in general, and every one in particular. Abel is counted among the prophets, because he prefigured or foreshowed Jesus Christ by his innocence and death, as Cain did Judas and the Jewish people, by his treachery, envy, and fratricide. Extraordinary crimes, which put an end to the patience of God, are punished with a general punishment ; because the corruption and impenitence are then become general, the people join in the sins of their leaders, and they seem to have heaped up and surpassed all the wickedness of preceding ages.

“ 52. Woe unto you, lawyers ! for ye have taken

away the key of knowledge : ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered."

The eleventh mark or character of hypocrites is, that they imagine themselves alone in possession of knowledge, though they be ignorant, and endeavour to keep others in ignorance as much as possible. It is a wretched and damnable artifice of those who would tyrannize over the consciences of men, to introduce and continue ignorance in the church. They who are resolved not to follow the light, are far from endeavouring to disperse the darkness, by the favour of which they securely reign.

" 53. And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things; 54. Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him."

The twelfth and last character of the imitators of the Pharisees is, that they place all their strength in confidence, craft, and deceit; whereas sincerity, humility, and trust in God, are the whole strength of the righteous. It is the common way of heretics and false teachers, to be provoked by the advice which is given them, and, at the imputations with which they are justly charged, to clear no one point, to answer by new questions, and to seek to surprise their adversaries, or to catch something out of their mouth, that they may accuse them. Thy wisdom and light, O Lord, can disperse all their artifice and darkness. Cast the bright beams of this light on those who are to defend themselves against these subtle and deceitful men. Raise and animate their

heart, that they may not be wanting to the cause of truth; guide their tongues, that they may not be deficient in prudence, nor expose the truth by any indiscretions, or unseasonable transports of zeal.

CHAPTER XII.

SECT. I.—*The Leaven of the Pharisees. We must fear God only, trust in him, and confess him.*

“ 1. IN the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

Great and habitual hypocrites, and whose hypocrisy tends to seduce the minds of men by error, or to corrupt their manners by sin, ought not to be concealed. But to qualify a man to tax others with this vice, he must either know the bottom of the heart, as Jesus did, or there must be such full proof and evidence of the thing, that he may be certain of it. Some particular persons among the Pharisees might be exempt from this crime; and yet this did not hinder Christ from bringing a general charge against the whole body: because private good ought to give way to public.

“ 2. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.”

In vain, when we are about to commit a sin, do we shun the sight of men, since we cannot possibly avoid that of our Judge. The darkness of the night, and the light of the day, to him are both alike.

Sooner or later the hypocrite will be known for what he is; and he is often discovered even in this life. It is just, that those who have not the least esteem and value for the life to come, should not even in this be secure of enjoying always the short pleasure of a vain reputation.

“ 3. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops.”

The more a sinner endeavours to hide himself here, with the greater shame and confusion shall he be covered hereafter in the sight of all the world. That which constitutes the peace and satisfaction of a good man is, that he does nothing in secret of which he need be ashamed at the day of judgment; and that he shuns the eyes of men, on no other account but only that he may not receive from them his reward. Let us often reflect upon this truth, that our Judge is our witness, and that the thickest darkness is so far from covering us from his sight, that it becomes bright and clear, so as to show us plainly to him, with all our most secret lusts and desires. It is not enough for a minister of the truths of the gospel not to corrupt them in secret, but he must produce them to open day-light, and preach them in the face of the whole world.

“ 4. And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.”

We ought to fear, not the death of the body, since it must die; but that of the soul, which was created to live eternally. Christ is not of the num-

ber of those friends who are altogether for sparing those they love the trouble of present evils, and for lulling them asleep as to those of eternity, for fear of disturbing and grieving their minds. True friendship consists in exciting our friends to do their duty, and saving their souls at the expense of all things. A man has but one life to lose, and one soul to save ; and it is madness to sacrifice the salvation of the soul to the preservation of the life of the body, instead of sacrificing the latter to the salvation of the former.

“ 5. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”

What darkness must have overspread the mind of man, what corruption must there be in his heart, since it was requisite that God should take upon him our flesh, to teach us that he alone ought to be feared ! It is our fondness for the present life and the conveniences thereof, which makes us fear men, and is the cause that we cannot prevail with ourselves to fear none but God. He alone is able to disengage the heart from these things, who is Lord of it at present, and who shall hereafter be its life and eternal felicity. Teach us, Lord, this necessary lesson. Grant that I may love nothing which it is in the power of men to give or take away ; to the end that thou mayest be the sole object of my fear, as well as of my love.

“ 6. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God ?”

The providence of God is the comfort of the righteous. The little faith we have as to the care, vigilance, and concern of God, in every thing which relates to us, is the source of all human disquiets and

fears. His wisdom cannot be surprised, his power cannot be forced, his love cannot forget itself: this ought to make us easy and satisfied, yet so as not to neglect human means. Man distrusts God, and fears that he is forgotten by him, because he judges of God by himself, is very apt to forget him, and to be unfaithful to him.

“ 7. But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore : ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

Some men admire the providence of God over the smallest creatures, who yet, upon occasion, are uneasy and solicitous, as if they believed none with respect to themselves. God watches over every thing, without debasing himself; he acts in every thing, without growing weary ; and he is sufficient for every thing, without multiplying himself: and this because he need only will, and because whatever good he designs his creatures, he wills it by his power and his love. He alone knows our value, because he alone knows how much he loves us, and because he is himself the price of our love. Since God is mindful of man with so much goodness, how can man be so unmindful of God ?

“ 8. Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God :”

Christ will treat us at the day of judgment, as we have treated him in the time of our life. Happy is that person who confesses him in his heart, with his mouth, and by his works ! We should esteem it an honour to declare for Christ, if it cost us none of our worldly pretensions : as if he was not capable of mak-

ing us amends for whatever we can lose for his sake; and as if it were not sufficient to be owned by him as joint-heirs, and called to possess his inheritance together with him.

“9. But he that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God.”

What despair must be the portion of that soul which Jesus Christ denies and renounces! To whom can it belong but to the devil, whom it chose for its master, when it refused to acknowledge Christ for its Lord and its God? Every age has its proper manner of confessing or denying Christ, as every age has its proper way of persecuting those who do confess him. The disposition whereby we are ready to give up our life and our blood, is requisite at all times; and when a man has it, he sits very loose from every thing else. The less we lose at present, the more culpable are we, if we are unwilling, when occasion requires, to relinquish it for the sake of Christ.

“10. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven.”

To what remedy can the sinner have recourse, if he reject the Holy Ghost, who alone calls him to repentance, and gives him the grace and the will to perform it. He who through fear renounces Christ, is not far from speaking against him: but to renounce the faith through infidelity, and to call every thing which the Spirit of God has done by Christ and his apostles a mere illusion, this is a blasphemy out of which men seldom or never recover, because the root

of faith is plucked up, and every principle of life extinguished.

“ 11. And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say :”

Who would not despair of being able to stand against so many sorts of temptations, if Christ did not assure us, that it is neither by our own understanding nor strength that we are to resist them ? It is the chief foundation of our hope, not to place our trust and confidence in ourselves, but to be thoroughly sensible of our own ignorance and weakness.

“ 12. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

The knowledge of our own inability would serve only to make us despair, if Christ had not promised that his Spirit should supply all our defects, and do all in us. This Spirit is that perfect Master, who enlightens the understanding, inflames the heart, and forms the very words in our mouth. O Holy Spirit ! thou art my only hope : be not wanting to me in my need, and at the hour of temptation. Instruct me in the manner peculiar to thyself, by causing me to know, love, and perform my duty.

SECT. II.—*We must beware of Covetousness. The Worldly Rich. The Rich towards God.*

“ 13. ¶ And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.”

The possessions of this world are only occasions of

division, trouble, and scandal: the certain way for a man to enjoy peace, is not to set his heart upon them. The strictest and closest ties are not proof against interest and the desire of riches. Would to God that Christians, after the example of this person, instead of going to law, would refer their interests to the determination of understanding and charitable arbitrators! This is the fruit of a good sermon; and a pastor ought to preach in such a manner, as to gain the confidence of the faithful to that degree, that they may believe they put their interests into the hands of Christ, in putting them into his.

“ 14. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?”

A person consecrated to God ought not to concern himself with temporal affairs, any farther than charity and the order of discipline engage him therein, without prejudice to more essential duties. Our blessed Lord could have decided this difference in a moment; but the example of a perfect disengagement from worldly things, was more necessary for the ministers of the church, than that of a charity applying itself to temporal concerns. A common father ought not to run the risk of losing that confidence which is necessary with respect to the affairs of salvation, by concerning himself with the temporal interest of one of the parties, without the consent of the other.

“ 15. And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

It is not for the ministers of the church to meddle with the partition of estates, or with the differences in families ; but they ought to teach the faithful the rules of Christian piety, and the means of avoiding all injustice. This vice still proceeds from covetousness, and therefore this is the thing which must be rooted up. A man's life does not consist in superfluities, but in necessaries : the safest way is to keep to these. A man is really covetous, not only in taking away the goods of others, but likewise in preserving and securing his own with too much affection and concern.

“ 16. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully : 17. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits ?”

Peace is to be found in evangelical poverty, or in Christian mediocrity : there is nothing but vexation in riches, though ever so well acquired. Great wealth is but a great incumbrance, when a man has not learned to wean his affections from it. How can such things be called goods, of which even the abundance vexes and disturbs the mind, which cannot be preserved without great pains and cost, and which, through the fear of losing them, become the torment of him who possesses them ? There are no true goods, O my God, but only those which thou designest for thy elect ; namely, the good things of heaven, which increase by desires, which are laid up only in the heart, which enlarge it, which, by multiplying, make room for themselves therein, and which secure and preserve themselves ; because, to love them

always, is sufficient of itself to keep us from ever losing them.

“ 18. And he said, This will I do : I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.”

The rich are full of designs concerning this life till the very time of their death, without thinking of eternity. Vain and foolish employment of the children of this world, to pass their life in removing, heaping, and raising up earth, to afford a momentary spectacle to the eyes of their flesh, or a transient amusement to the desires of their heart ! Senseless wretch ! to call those things which were liable to perish in a moment, all his goods ; and thereby to renounce the good things of eternity, and God himself, the only sovereign and infinite Good ! How comes it to pass, that this rich man does not apprehend, that, in bestowing this superfluity which perplexes him in the hands of the poor, he may, without any farther charge, securely lay up a treasure for eternity ?

“ 19. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”

The rich are often surprised by death in the midst of their delights. The most common fruit of wealth is a soft and voluptuous life. Labour, fasting, and the godly sorrow of repentance, are the portion of the elect in this life ; that of the reprobate, is idleness, sensuality, and pleasure. There are few who speak as this rich man did ; but the world is full of rich persons who live like him. It is a great misfortune for the generality of the rich, that they are not

poor ; and that they have such great possessions as to live in pride, idleness, and luxury : but who is sensible of this ? Moderate poverty is a great talent in order to salvation ; but it is one which nobody desires. How many rich men, like this here before us, have only just time to look upon their riches, and then die, without any enjoyment of those on earth, and without the least hopes of those in heaven ! ”

“ 20. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ? ”

A strange, but very common blindness this, for men to heap up immense riches, and to build palaces for a moment of life which remains, and not to think at all of eternity, which follows this moment ! God does not pronounce this sentence upon each rich man in particular ; but he speaks here to all. Nothing is more inculcated in the Scriptures than the folly of the rich, and the vanity of riches ; but no person applies it to himself. Those whose wisdom, conduct, and address, the world so highly extols, for having raised a great fortune for their children, and in a little time—those very persons, God calls by no other name than that of fools.

“ 21. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Nothing but a curse attends those riches, the use of which is not directed towards God and salvation. It is the property of the covetous man to lay up treasure, not for his own occasions, nor for those of others, but merely for himself, in order to make his riches his delight, his happiness, and his god, in-

stead of making them the riches of his God, by laying them out according to his law and will, transmitting them to heaven by the hands of the poor, and employing them to his glory and to the salvation of souls.

SECT. III.—*We must not be solicitous about Food and Raiment. We must seek God alone.*

“ 22. ¶ And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. 23. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.”

It is very easy to pass from solicitousness to covetousness ; therefore, to avoid the latter, we must secure ourselves from the former. Who is He who formed our body ; who composed it of so many different parts, and joined those parts together in so just a proportion ; who causes them to receive spirits and life by means of so many different vessels ; who preserves the temperature of the humours, so necessary to its health and conservation ; and keeps off so many inward and outward accidents, and so many dangers which are capable of destroying it ? Is he not the same God ? And can we then fear that he will suffer us to want that little which is necessary to feed and clothe this body ? That person, who with faith and gratitude often reflects upon what he has already received from God, is far from distrusting his providence for the time to come.

“ 24. Consider the ravens : for they neither sow nor reap ; which neither have storehouse nor barn ; and God feedeth them. How much more are ye better than the fowls ?”

The sight and consideration of the world is a continual lesson for a rational creature; and faith finds something every where to increase and strengthen itself, from the conduct which God observes therein. The care which he takes of the most useless, voracious, and destitute animals, from the time of their birth, upbraids men with their uneasiness and distrust. Man knows but too well his own excellence, and how to set himself off when he would gain the confidence of others. But he forgets what he is, when he should put his confidence in God.

“ 25. And which of you, with taking thought, can add to his stature one cubit?”

An anxious concern about the future, gives man abundance of trouble, and is of no manner of use to him: confidence in God is always useful and beneficial, and yet he cannot persuade himself to trust in him. He can add nothing to the work of God: it is God alone who formed him, who causes him to grow up to his full stature and perfection, and preserves him by the ordinary means which he has appointed. If these fail us, he supplies the want of them by extraordinary ways, which are equally in his hands with the other, unless our distrust render us unworthy of them.

“ 26. If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?”

True confidence must needs be a thing extremely rare and very necessary, since Christ recommends it to us with so much earnestness. Let the experience of our own inability as to those things which are least, oblige us at last to resign ourselves up entirely to God on all extraordinary occasions, and to acknow-

ledge that it is through his blessing alone that our most ordinary cares and endeavours succeed.

“ 27. Consider the lilies, how they grow : they toil not, they spin not ; and yet I say unto you, That Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.”

Let us learn of Christ to make a good and holy use of the works of God ; and to contemplate in them his greatness, majesty, paternal providence, perfections, and conduct. Man, who is nothing but weakness, affects to distinguish and set himself off by great things : God can make his greatness admired in the least, and cause his providence to shine forth in the meanest of his creatures.

“ 28. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven ; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith ?”

Here is matter of humiliation for the great : the gaiety of their clothes does not come near the beauty of a flower or herb of the field. Here is matter of consolation and confidence for the poor : they have a great treasure, if they have a great faith. If nothing was ever wanting to man, he would always have great reason indeed to praise God, and to give him thanks for his bounty and liberality ; but he would have no occasion to exercise his faith and trust. To be sensible of benefits is a human virtue ; but it is a divine virtue to depend upon an invisible God as if he were visible, and with confidence to expect every thing from him, without any other security but his word.

“ 29. And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.”

Christ does not forbid the labour of the body, but the uneasiness and distrust of the mind. Men seek human supports ; but a Christian, who is somewhat more than a man, ought to rest only upon a divine foundation, which is the goodness and promise of God. The mind which has faith for its support, is not doubtful and wavering : he who has it not, is like a building in the air, and without foundation.

“ 30. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after : and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.”

Distrust is the property of infidels : and trust or confidence, the virtue of the children of God. For men to rely upon their own industry, care, and labour, is to resemble the heathens ; it is peculiar to those who have God for their Father, to trust to his love and tenderness, without giving themselves up to negligence or sloth.

“ 31. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God ; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Is it not evident, that the generality of men do the direct contrary to that which God requires of them, seeking all other things first, and frequently them alone ; and yet expect the kingdom of God should be added unto them ? Do not these words of Christ seem likewise to be misplaced, who here obliges us to seek that which depends least upon our search, and to expect to receive that which depends most upon our own labour ? The reason of this is, because sloth is more usual, and more to be feared, in the business of salvation, and uneasiness more common with respect to temporal concerns.

SECT. IV.—*The little Flock. Our Treasure and our Heart must be in Heaven.*

“ 32. Fear not, little flock ; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

It is the small number which is saved ; and therefore we ought to fear to be of the great number of the reprobate. The goodness of God towards his elect is all their security. Who would not have despaired, if Christ had only said, “ Seek ye the kingdom of God,” &c. and had not here added, that this kingdom is a gift of God—of God as a Father, which, by consequence, includes the gift of divine adoption ; a free gift, depending upon the good pleasure of his will, and proceeding from his paternal love ; and a gift of an unchangeable kingdom to all those who are to compose this little flock in heaven ? Give us, Lord, that which thou commandest. Cause and enable us to seek, find, and preserve, that righteousness which alone leads to this kingdom, and gives a right thereto.

“ 33. Sell that ye have, and give alms ; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.”

God freely gives his kingdom, and yet it must be purchased. The poor are those who sell it, and receive the price. This price is just so much as we are able to give : it costs little, if we have but little ; much, if we have much. But we must give all, either by actually parting with every thing, if God, by calling us to perfection, require it of us ; or at least by disengaging our heart from every thing, if God

vouchsafe to be satisfied therewith. We can give nothing but what we have received; and we receive even the grace to give it, and the hundred-fold of that which is given by us. The treasure we give is liable to perish four ways—to be worn out, wasted, stolen, and corrupted; and we receive it again, a treasure which is eternal, which faileth not, and which cannot possibly be either lost or corrupted. It is the hand of the poor which works this miracle.

“ 34. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Happy is that person who has nothing on earth which detains and fixes his heart there. Every one lays up his treasure on earth, if he take not great care; and this earthly treasure is whatever he loves contrary to the will of God, and in which he seeks his own satisfaction. One person, his gold, silver, furniture; his estate, grandeur, glory; his business, diversions, pleasures, &c. Another, his learning, books, reputation, ease; his friends, their esteem, applause, and company, the sweetness of their conversation, &c. And it is thou alone, O my God, whom we ought to seek in all these things, who shouldst be to us even all things, and the only treasure of our heart !

SECT. V.—*The watchful, faithful, and wise Servant.*

“ 35. Let your loins be girded about, and *your lights burning ;” [*Fr. Have lighted lamps in your hands.]

Christ here proposes to us several means of securing our salvation :—First, According to the custom of

servants, soldiers, and travellers, who used to gird up their upper garment, a Christian ought to be always ready to do the will of God, as a vigilant and faithful servant; to fight, as a soldier of Christ, against sin, and the enemies of his salvation; and to remove to another country, as a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. Second, He must have in his hand the lamp of faith, always lighted by reading and meditating upon God's word, always burning with the love of God and of his neighbour, and always filled with the oil of good works.

“ 36. And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.”

Third, A Christian must live in expectation of his Lord, who will return from the wedding, when (the number of those espoused souls whom God designs to take eternally to himself being complete) he shall come to judge the world, and to consummate the happiness of the elect, by the resurrection of their bodies: or when he comes to take the righteous out of this present world. He who expects his master, is always in that state wherein he desires to be found. Fourth, A Christian must not look upon death with concern and anxiety, but with submission, love, joy, and, if possible, with the earnestness and impatience of a good servant, who waits for his master's return after a long absence, who opens to him immediately, and goes out to meet him.

“ 37. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, That he shall gird himself, and make them

to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

Fifth, The Christian, in order to secure his salvation, must live in Christian watchfulness, intent upon his duty, not suffering his heart to be overcharged with the cares of this world, with the love of life, or with carnal pleasures, never losing sight of the last moment, or of that eternity which follows it, and continually observing all the motions of his own heart. Happy that person, who, living only to and for God in this world, shall, in the other, sit down at God's table, and there live in and upon God himself to all eternity !

" 38. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants."

Sixth, The Christian must look upon every hour as that which may possibly be his last. The generality of mankind place their happiness in things which cause their eternal misery. The only true happiness of this life is, to secure a happy eternity ; and this is done by Christian vigilance.

" 39. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through."

Seventh, A Christian must at all times suspect and mistrust the artifices and snares of the devil. With what care do people watch, that they may not lose their money, their furniture, and other perishing things ! It seems as if the soul were the only thing not worth the pains of being watched and guarded !

" 40. Be ye therefore ready also : for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not."

Eighth, The Christian must take care to keep his conscience clear, and always ready to appear before the Son of God. He who would be always ready, ought always to be under some penitential exercise, and to cleave to nothing which may hinder him from going to God, and doing that which is pleasing in his sight. Are not so many sudden and unexpected deaths sufficient to convince us of the folly of depending upon life, and assuring ourselves of one single moment, though Christ had not given us any warning against it?

“ 41. ¶ Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?”

Ninth, Every one ought to persuade himself that the truths of the gospel are addressed to him in particular. The ministers of the Lord are often those who apply those truths least to themselves which they preach to others, and are likewise soonest surprised by death. No state, no condition, no age, is excused from watching: because death is the punishment of all, and it is nature which is condemned thereto. There is no safer way we can take, than to count ourselves in the number of those who are to be surprised: the only reason why so many fall into this misfortune is, because they flatter themselves that they shall not.

“ 42. And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?”

The tenth and last means to secure our salvation is, to be faithful in performing the duties of our state in the time of our life, if we would be found at that

of death employed in the work which God has committed to our care. Observe here two main qualities in a pastor. The first is fidelity, in not appropriating to himself the gifts of God, as time, talents, &c. The second is prudence, in employing them to the profit of his household, which is the church. Whoever remembers that he is only a steward, is far from desiring to command and dispose of every thing as master. God will be served in his own way, not in ours. A man must, not only in order to his admittance into the ministry, depend upon and be directed by him, as the Master of the family, but also as to the quality, measure, and time of the food which he is to give, both to all in general, and to every one in particular. It is a great part of pastoral prudence, to give the proper portion, and to do it in due season.

“ 43. Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.”

Miserable then is he, whom death surprises either doing evil, or doing nothing, or doing that which God does not require of him ! A pastor’s life is a life of labour, and of a labour which must be continued to his very last breath. If he be not found intent upon his work when his Lord cometh, how can he have any right to the blessedness belonging to the faithful and wise servant ? He must never quit his station, either through discouragement, or idleness, or indifference.

“ 44. Of a truth I say unto you, That he will make him ruler over all that he hath.”

The labour is great, but the reward is without measure. We should be able to comprehend it, could we comprehend all the riches of God—that

is, God himself. To see the idleness of so many pastors and ministers of the church, can any one think that they really believe this promise, confirmed with a kind of oath by truth itself?

SECT. VI.—*The violent and unfaithful Servant.*

“ 45. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken;”

One cause of our forgetfulness as to our duty, and of our contempt of God’s law, is, that we are apt to flatter ourselves with the hopes of a long life, and to look upon death as at a great distance. The two common vices of wicked pastors, from which a great many more proceed, are, 1. Their ruling with a spirit of imperiousness, with severity and violence. 2. Their enjoying, in ease and idleness, the conveniences and pleasures of life, and the temporal advantages of their dignity. My God ! whither are not sinners led by a forgetfulness of death and of thy judgments? Suffer us not, we beseech thee, to fall into it.

“ 46. The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”

The punishment of an unfaithful minister, as well as of every wicked Christian, is, 1. An untimely, sudden, or unexpected death. 2. An eternal separation from God. 3. An everlasting torment with the devils and the reprobate.—Death has nothing in it which is either dreadful, or of fatal consequence, to

him who lives in continual expectation of it. But under what despair must he necessarily fall, whom it surprises in the midst of pleasures, in a course of sin, and a total forgetfulness of God! Let us say to ourselves every day, and if possible every hour, that the Lord is at the door, and that the moment which will decide our eternal state is at hand.

“47. And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

How much is knowledge to be dreaded, when our charity and works are not answerable thereto! To be ignorant of our Lord’s will and our own duty, is a sin which deserves punishment, or is rather itself a punishment of sin: but not to do according to his will when we do know it, is a criminal contempt of the law of God. This knowledge comes from thee alone, O Lord, and likewise the use which I ought to make of it. Grant that I may apply myself here-to, not out of a fear of punishment, but from a sincere love of thee.

“48. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.”

The ignorance of our duty towards God as our Creator and Lord, may sometimes extenuate our sin in transgressing his law; but it can never entirely exempt us from guilt. Lord, it belongs to thee to disperse the darkness of our ignorance, as it does to heal the corruption of our sinful inclinations and desires.

“— For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

The more graces a man has received, the more reason has he to fear, and the greater obligation to labour for God. An enlightened pastor trembles under the weight of the talents he has received for the benefit of souls, as well as under the weight of the souls he is to serve by those talents. Every thing is given by God as upon account: we must therefore make it appear, how it has been laid out, and be answerable for all which is charged to us. God will allow the servant whatever he has disbursed for his Master's glory: but how can the servant return those gifts which he has parted with to vanity, and consumed upon his lusts and passions? How can he recover those souls which have been lost through his negligence?

SECT. VII.—*Fire sent on the Earth. Division.
The time of the Messias not known. We must
agree with our Adversary.*

“ 49. ¶ I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I if it be already kindled?”

The fervour of charity, a zeal for the salvation of souls, a love of mortification, and the heat of persecution, adversity, and affliction, are so many sorts of fire which consume the filth of a sinner, and complete the sacrifice of a Christian and of a minister of the gospel. O Jesus, cast, I beseech thee, one spark of thy heavenly fire into my heart. Let thy love be kindled therein, and consecrate it to thy will: the fire of that divine love I mean, sent by Christ on the earth, on purpose to consume all sin, and consecrate man to his God.

“ 50. But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”

Christ had his passion continually present to his mind. His love for the cross condemns the tenderness and delicacy of Christians, and much more that of pastors. The earnest desire by which he is straitened is, to bring forth his church by his pains, to wash her in his blood, to give her life by his own death, and to establish the kingdom and glory of his Father by the sacrifice of himself. This disposition of the High Priest of good things to come, in not regarding his life, so he can but promote the glory of God and the salvation of sinners, how suitable is it to his holiness, how fit to be engraved on the heart of every pastor !

“ 51. Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth ? I tell you, Nay ; but rather division : ”

God came indeed to bring division on earth, but such a division as separates us from the creature, only to unite us to the Creator ; and makes us hate the spirit of the world, in order to follow that of God. For peace with God and peace with the world are altogether inconsistent. There are but too many ministers of the church, as well as private Christians, who seem to believe, that Christ came with no other design, but to introduce a carnal peace and a sensual repose. We can scarce think otherwise, when we see them entirely taken up in settling themselves therein, and making even religion and Christ himself subservient to that purpose. What ! shall we be unwilling to do any thing which may set us at variance with the world, and make us break with it ? How opposite is this to the design and spirit of Jesus Christ !

“ 52. For from henceforth there shall be five in

one house divided, three against two, and two against three. 53. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

There is no union, how close and natural soever it be, which we must not resolve to break, rather than separate ourselves from unity itself, when faith and the interests of God are in question. A small temporal interest often occasions a misunderstanding in families the most united: but a miracle of grace is necessary to produce a separation upon the motives of piety and religion. Send, Lord, this salutary division, the work of the Spirit of unity alone, among those who are separated from thee, only because they are too closely united one with another!

" 54. ¶ And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. 55. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass."

The mind of man has but little insight into the things of God, because it applies itself but little to them, and is diverted from them by his passions: but in those of nature, and of the present life, it is very discerning, because his curiosity, interest, and other passions, give a relish to the study of these things, and make them grateful to his understanding or senses. It is towards the setting sun, that is, towards Christ dying, that we must turn ourselves, to the end, that the shower of blood which wet his cross,

may produce a shower of tears to wash our heart. It is to his heart, all inflamed with charity, that we must address ourselves, in order to have our own inflamed with this divine fire.

“ 56. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?”

The true knowledge of a Christian penitent consists in being able to discern the time of repentance and mercy, which incessantly glides away and will never return. The infallible marks of the time of salvation, which are prophecies and miracles, will condemn all incredulous persons, who are apt enough to be full of confidence in unprofitable and uncertain sciences. The ignorance of hypocrites is either pretended or judicial. To them every thing is obscure in mysteries, and uncertain in religion, either because they reject the light, which they will not follow; or because they are delivered up to their own darkness, as the punishment of their pride and hypocrisy. How fatal is this state, and how much to be dreaded!

“ 57. Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?”

Righteousness and truth seldom find admittance into the minds of men, unless some interest open their eyes, or grace work this miracle. When there is any danger of losing some temporal good, nothing escapes their penetration and prudence: but they shut their eyes against all light, when they are obliged to sacrifice either some temporal good, or some passion, to the only true and eternal good. Very often a little reflection upon ourselves, and upon our ordinary conduct, would enable us to judge what we ought

to do in order to our salvation : but even this reflection, which we think need cost nothing, is only to be obtained by the gift of God.

“ 58. ¶ When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him ; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison.”

We must not delay to appease and quiet the remorses of our conscience : but the only way to do it as we ought, is to avoid, or to make some amends for the evil with which it upbraids us, in preventing the justice of God by a speedy repentance. There is not so much as one moment to be lost, since we cannot be certain of one moment. Men improve their time with consummate skill and prudence, when the interests of this mortal life are concerned : but they squander it away in a foolish and desperate manner, when their everlasting salvation lies at stake. Thou, O Lord, givest us these moments, on which eternity depends : give us likewise, we beseech thee, the grace to employ them in such a manner as eternity deserves !

“ 59. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.”

Observe here the dreadful severity of the judgments of God. Wise and prudent is he, who prevents it by repentance, and by a faithful performance of all the good which his conscience dictates and grace inspires. When we are once out of the way of repentance and mercy, what can we expect but the rigour of an inflexible justice ? Where there is no longer charity, there is no longer any return to

God; nothing which he can receive by way of payment. When there is no more time, there is no more hope for eternity.

CHAPTER XIII.

SECT. I.—*The necessity of Repentance. The barren Fig-tree.*

“ 1. THERE were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2. And Jesus, answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?”

Jesus restrains the rashness of human judgments. No man is punished without being a sinner: but they are not the greatest sinners who are punished most in this life. It is only in the other, that God punishes with the view chiefly of inflicting punishment; and that his justice proportions the punishment to the sin. Here the punishment proceeds, either from his mercy, which would fain save the sinner; or from his holiness, which purifies the saints; or from his providence, which establishes the belief of his justice; or from his wisdom, which by means of fear puts a stop to sin.

“ 3. I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Impunity hardens and stupifies the sinner, through his abuse of the patience of God: but it is this very patience which induces the elect to love repentance and mortification, well knowing, that sin must be

punished either in this world or in the next, either by the justice of God, or by the voluntary affliction of the sinner. To repent, is not a matter of counsel, but of absolute necessity. He who defers doing it, hazards no less than eternity. Let us not imitate the Jews, who were in effect massacred and sacrificed in the temple to the justice of God, for not having profited by the admonitions of the Son of God, so as to be converted before the destruction of Jerusalem.

“ 4. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem ?”

Open sins are not always the greatest, nor the punishments which are visible to the eyes of men such as are most to be feared. Christ here gives us to understand, that all human events or natural accidents happen only according to God’s appointment; and that he makes every thing subservient to his designs and judgments. Would to God we were so faithful as to observe the hand of God, and to have recourse to him, in every thing which happens to us by means of the creatures ! Whether we suffer by the injustice of men, (ver. 1.) or by unforeseen accidents, (ver. 4.), Christ here informs us, that it still proceeds from the justice of God, who makes use of both to chastise us, either as a judge or as a father.

“ 5. I tell you, Nay : but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Why does Christ repeat this truth so frequently and forcibly, but only because there are fewer true penitents than we imagine ; and because men are not sufficiently convinced of the necessity of repentance ?

There is no medium: either repentance or damnation. It is a small thing to perish in the ruins of a city as the Jews did, or in the ruins of the world as at the last day, if a man has taken timely care to secure his soul by repentance: but how great must be the despair, when the first death is followed by the second! Let us seriously reflect on this.

“ 6. ¶ He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.”

This barren fig-tree is faith without works. It is not enough for a man to be grafted on Jesus Christ by baptism, as all Christians are; to be planted in the true church, as the orthodox; to be associated to the priesthood of Christ, as the clergy; or to be incorporated into some society for the propagation of religion: the life must be answerable to the holiness of the baptism, church, priesthood, and religion. Let us seek for fruit ourselves in our lives, before Jesus Christ come to do it. Lord, how canst thou possibly find any, if thou thyself dost not first produce it in our hearts by thy grace?

“ 7. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”

How many years does God wait for the fruit of his mysteries and graces, and we yield him nothing but ineffectual promises and barren resolutions! Public chastisements, calamities, and diseases, are so many admonitions from God, in order to our conversion, and threaten us with his wrath and indignation. They are the voice of God: and when we

are deaf thereto, it is he whom we refuse to hear. Life is conferred upon us, to no other end, but that we should serve God, perform repentance, and work out our own salvation. He who does no part of this, well deserves to have it immediately cut off and taken from him.

“ 8. And he, answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: 9. And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.”

The patience of God with respect to sinners, is one of the most surprising things imaginable, when we consider what God, and what the sinner is: and yet who is there, who frequently thinks of this, adores it, renders thanks for it, and co-operates with it? They are the prayers and labours of holy pastors, which suspend the wrath of God and attract his mercy. A soul subsists sometimes, only by the sighs and penitential exercises of him to whose care God has committed it; and a community, a church, and a whole people, by nothing but the tears, charity, good works, and fidelity of a small number of God’s servants, who faithfully perform their duty. Let us fear that the building is near its fall, when God removes the pillars of it. The patience of God is great, and of long continuance; but it is wearied out at last, when it has no effect upon sinners.

SECT. II.—*The Woman bowed together. The Sabbath-day.*

“ ¶ 10. And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen

years, and was bowed together, and could in nowise lift up herself."

Christ confirms his word and mission by a miracle, joins works to instruction, and shows, by the cure of the body, what he came to perform on the soul. Into what condition does a long habit of sin put a soul which is possessed thereby? What will become of it, O Lord, unless thou vouchsafest, by thy almighty grace, to deliver it from this voluntary bondage, to rectify its will and inclinations, which are become altogether earthly, and to raise and lift it up towards thyself?

" 12. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. 13. And he laid his hands on her :"

It is this preventing eye of the mercy of God, which seeks the sinner in the depth of his misery: it is his inward word which calls him; his sovereign will which draws and heals him; and his beneficent hand which confirms and strengthens him, heaps his blessings upon him, and leads and conducts him in the way of salvation.

" — And immediately she was made straight, and glorified God."

God alone can reform and correct his own work, both in nature and in grace. We must resign ourselves up entirely to him. He whose will is omnipotence itself, has no occasion either for time or means to accomplish his works. Lord, thou canst perform, now thou art in heaven, whatever thou didst upon earth; thou canst effect in the heart whatever thou didst then on the body. Rectify in me, I be-

seech thee, every thing which is not conformable to the rule of thy holy will. The gratitude and acknowledgment of the creature, is a new benefit of the Creator; and the glory which we render him for his gifts, is still a fresh obligation and engagement to glorify him again.

“ 14. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath-day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath-day.”

Religion often serves to cover envy and avarice: we cannot be too much upon our guard against this sort of imposture. Ye great pretenders to zeal for the sanctification of the Sabbath, blind judges of the works of God, unjust accusers of his elect, and ignorant interpreters of his law, learn not to confound the servile works of men with the works of God, mercenary employments with acts of charity, and common labour with necessary assistance and relief. The one are forbidden by the law to be exercised on the Sabbath-day; the other are the completion of the law, the sanctification of the Sabbath, and that very rest which God commands to be observed, which consists in resting in him by holiness and charity.

“ 15. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?”

Necessity and charity are laws which are superior to all others. Men are always ready, either out of interest or envy, to condemn every thing in those

whom they do not love. When the essence of religion is made to consist in ceremonies and external usages, every seeming violation of them passes for irreligion and profaneness. This is, in the judgment of Christ himself, the vice of hypocrites, as well as to have two different measures, and to object, as a crime to others, that which they practise every day themselves.

“ 16. And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath-day ?”

Nothing is more proper for the Lord’s day than the work of the Lord, which is to destroy the works of Satan. What grievous bonds are those of the devil, which confine the body in this sad condition ! But how much more grievous and fatal are the bonds of sin, which detain souls as slaves under his tyranny, chained down to earthly pleasures and desires, and unable to lift their hearts up towards God, or to desire the things of heaven ! It is the office of a good pastor to spend his life in labouring to deliver them, and thereby conduct them to the eternal sabbath.

“ 17. And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed : and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.”

Men cannot long resist truth ; but it does not convert all those whom it confounds. The passions blind the understanding, and harden the heart against it : that of the common people opens itself thereto without difficulty, because not corrupted either by envy or interest. It is always time to show by our

joy, and other religious dispositions, how much we are concerned in the mysteries, works, and glory of Christ. We ought, in reading them, to be transported with joy in our heart, if we have any love towards Jesus Christ.

SECT. III.—*The Grain of Mustard-seed. The Leaven in the Dough.*

“ 18. ¶ Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?”

The good disposition of these people, which comes originally from Christ himself, engages him to instruct them in the truths of salvation, and concerning the kingdom of God. He has more regard to the good and honest heart, which he gives to the simple, than to the bad disposition of conceited scholars, which proceeds from themselves. It frequently happens, that some pious souls, which are ready to embrace whatever is good, which are faithful to God, and earnestly desirous of his word, prevail with him not to remove out of a country a faithful minister.

“ 19. It is like a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.”

The imperceptible growth of grace and of the church, is much to be admired; but neither the beauty nor the perfection of the church, is to be seen in this life. Here every thing relating to her appears little, because she is as yet in a state of humiliation; her light being obscure, her charity imperfect, and her children not yet become fowls of heaven. When will it be, O my God, that thy

spouse will arrive at her perfect age ; that this tree will attain to the greatness, extent, and height, which thou hast designed it ; and that we, being perfectly disengaged from the earth, shall lodge in the branches of it, to contemplate thee to all eternity ?

“ 20. ¶ And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God ? ”

A good pastor is never weary of instructing his flock, no more than a tender nurse is of giving suck to her infant. There always remains abundance to be said concerning the kingdom of God, because there are no words nor comparisons which can express the beauty and riches thereof.

“ 21. It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

Grace penetrates the soul, raises and transforms it, and changes the whole man into one entirely new, the darkness of his understanding into the light of God, the depraved love of his heart into a holy love, and the corruption of his senses into a regular and religious use. How then will it be, when God shall penetrate all our faculties with the light of his glory, and with the virtue of his divine essence, and be himself entirely in us ! Let this kingdom, which thou, O my God, hast promised us, come ; and let it be speedily established in our hearts !

“ 22. And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.”

A pastor who instructs his people with care, who visits his flock in the country, and is continually intent on his duty, such a pastor advances very fast

toward the heavenly Jerusalem. What fidelity, what courage ought not these toils and labours of the Prince of pastors in seeking his sheep, to inspire into the pastors of the church ! Form, O Lord, by thy Spirit, unwearied imitators of thy zeal !

SECT. IV.—*Few saved. The strait Gate. The Pretenders to Righteousness rejected.*

“ 23. ¶ Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved ? And he said unto them,”

Men are more inclined to ask curious questions, than to desire necessary instructions. Let us learn of Christ to speak with great discretion concerning hidden mysteries, and such truths as are of no general use. The truths which relate to practice, and which are instrumental in setting us forward in the way of salvation, are those which ought to employ our minds.

“ 24. Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

Christ here gives an implicit answer to the preceding question : for as there are few who strive to enter in at the strait gate, so there are few who are saved. Men may make devotion as easy as they please, they may widen the gate of heaven, and flatter themselves and others that their salvation is continually in their own hands : the direct contrary is true, since truth itself assures us so. There is nothing which is more an object of faith than that which the Author of faith here teaches us, namely, that salvation is neither for the slothful and idle, who will not strive, nor for such as will not enter in at the strait gate, nor yet for those who presume to the

very last, either upon their own strength, or upon the grace of God. God has his proper seasons, which we must by no means let slip. There will certainly come a time, when, by a just judgment, we shall not be able to do any thing, though we would ever so fain, because we would not do it when we might.

“ 25. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are :”

A false righteousness, and a repentance which comes too late, are equally rejected. No sinner ought, at any time, to believe that there is no more mercy for him, since God commands him to hope to the end: but he ought likewise to believe, since Christ himself declares so, that, unless he be converted now immediately, there may come a time, (and who can tell how soon ?) when he shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able; when he shall knock at the door, and it shall not be opened to him; when he shall pray, and shall not be heard ! Dreadful truths these, but such as are absolutely necessary to be known. To endeavour to conceal them, is to affect to be wiser than wisdom herself, who has revealed them to us.

“ 26. Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.”

The being familiarly acquainted with Christ himself in the flesh, is of no manner of use in order to salvation, without works. What will it signify to

the incredulous Jews, to have seen our blessed Saviour and his miracles, and to have heard his word from his own mouth, but only that they will undergo a severer punishment on that account? Those Christians, who are distinguished from infidels and impious persons by nothing but the external use of the word and sacraments, will not be owned as Christians by Him who will judge of Christianity by the life and by the works. God is not satisfied at the time of death, with those communions only of ceremony, nor with those shows of piety, which are not accompanied with a truly converted and Christian heart.

“ 27. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.”

It is very just that those who would not acknowledge Christ for their Master and Pattern, by obeying and imitating him during their life, should be altogether unknown to him at death and judgment. Not to be owned by Jesus Christ, is sufficient to our condemnation. Whoever does not belong to him, can belong only to the devil. This external separation of the creature from its God is a dreadful punishment: but the sinner separated himself first from God, by a will which, by means of his death, becomes eternal. He who does not tremble at this word, “ Depart,” nor endeavour to lead a life which may show him to be a Christian, has either no faith at all, or only so much as will be to his condemnation.

“ 28. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.”

The tears of penitents flow but for a moment, and produce an eternal happiness : those of the damned are eternal, and eternally fruitless and ineffectual. The joy and happiness of the elect will be the despair and punishment of the reprobate ; because in hell, envy will reign and be at its utmost height, as charity will be perfect in heaven. If we would not have the glory of the saints become the object of our envy then, let us earnestly endeavour, by imitating their fidelity now, to become the partners and companions of their felicity. The Jews, who were instructed by Jesus Christ himself, seemed to have great advantages above Abraham and the prophets : but a lively faith supplied all defects ; and the sight of Christ himself could not supply the defect of that alone.

“ 29. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.”

Let us be transported with joy, because the kingdom of God is established in the remotest countries : but let us, by our fidelity, take care that our grace be not transferred thither. We must co-operate by our prayers, desires, cares, and acts of charity, to enlarge the bounds of this kingdom, if we cannot do it by our labours and ministry. We secure ourselves a place in this kingdom, when we contribute to the entrance and admission of others into it.

“ 30. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

What amazing changes are these ! an exaltation of a moment is succeeded by an eternal humiliation in the damned : and a transient humiliation is crowned with everlasting glory in the elect. That the primacy

or first place in power, glory, riches, learning, &c. with which men are so intoxicated in this world, as to sacrifice every thing thereto, should vanish away, and be the cause of their abasement, is not so very strange and surprising. But that which ought to humble the greatest saints, and to make them tremble, is, that even the primacy in religion, piety, and the sublimest virtues, undergoes sometimes the same fate.

SECT. V.—*Herod called a Fox. The Passion foretold. Jerusalem a murdering City.*

“31. ¶ The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.”

There is no stratagem or artifice whatever, of which the devil does not make use by his ministers, to obstruct the work of God, to cause his servants to quit their station, and to cool their zeal. Power in the former, and love of life or ease in the latter, are the things which he most commonly employs to that purpose. The only shield which is proof against every thing is, to fear and love nothing but that which is eternal.

“32. And he said unto them, Go ye and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.”

Let us imitate the steadfastness and constancy of Christ, in performing our duty in spite of all the opposition of the world. When God has intrusted us with any work, we must labour without intermission, and finish it without any apprehensions from men. A minister of God has need of knowledge,

to discover the wiles of the serpent; of fidelity, to discharge all the duties of his ministry; and of courage, to despise death: for which reason, he must pray and humble himself very much. A true pastor ought to labour towards the salvation of souls, in casting out the devil of concupiscence, and procuring them the health of charity; and to be as diligent in doing this, as if he had but three days to live. Happy that pastor, who, like Jesus Christ, lives only to fight against the devil, and to do good to men, and looks upon death as a desirable sacrifice!

“ 33. Nevertheless, I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.”

Our life belongs to God; and that of his ministers is more especially in his hands, because it is bound up with his designs concerning his church. The threats of men are nothing, so long as God permits them to do nothing. Christ assigns the time and place of his death, as having them more in his own power than those who were to inflict it on him. The victim was not to be sacrificed far from the temple; the truth was to be accomplished near its types and figures; and Jerusalem to fill up the measure of her sins, in crucifying the Saviour of the world.

“ 34. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!”

How great is the goodness of God! how great the obdurateness of the sinner! Jerusalem, which

killed the prophets, is an emblem representing to us the world, in whose power it is to use the servants of God despitefully, and to persecute the ministers of his word. Whoever does this, makes a part of that criminal city. This Jerusalem would not have her children gathered together; but, notwithstanding this, our blessed Saviour gathers under his wings all those of her children whom he has chosen to salvation. In the mother, he shows how far a depraved will can go in resisting the Holy Spirit; in the children, he shows the power which his grace has over the will, in subjecting it freely to itself. Make us hear, O Jesus, this voice of thy love, and we shall then come unto thee. Place us under the shadow of thy wings, and we shall be in safety.

“ 35. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

The soul, abandoned by the light of truth, no longer knows God with a saving knowledge. What a frightful desert is a heart, when God withdraws and leaves it! What darkness overspreads it, when the eternal Light shines no longer therein! Let us take great care that our repeated acts of infidelity do not invariably lead us, like the Jews, into that dismal state. God was at last wearied with their disobedience and infidelity, after having afforded them so many opportunities of conversion, and sent them so many preachers of repentance. If he should likewise grow weary of our frequent relapses and revolts, as he did of theirs, what would become of us?

CHAPTER XIV.

SECT. I.—*The Dropsical Person healed on the Sabbath-day.*

“ 1. AND it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath-day, that they watched him.”

Christ goes not into public company, except when there is some good to be done. The world takes notice of every thing in ecclesiastical persons, and in the great: this obliges them to a particular care in all their actions. How corrupt is the heart of man! This Pharisee, instead of opening his heart to the light and grace offered him in this visit of our blessed Saviour, opens it only to malice and malicious suspicions. How should we be able of ourselves to profit by the afflictions which God sends us, since, without the assistance of his grace, we abuse even the most engaging instances of his favour!

“ 2. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy.”

It is sufficient sometimes that our miseries be only exposed to the eyes of mercy. Mercy is of a preventing nature, and, without staying for our solicitation, is disposed to do us good. The pride of man’s heart, which this dropsical person represents, stood in great need of such a charitable physician as Jesus Christ.

“ 3. And Jesus answering, spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day ?”

How great must the corruption be, where one is obliged to propose it as a question, Whether it be lawful to do good? It is not out of ignorance, but charity, that Christ asks this question, on purpose to give these men an occasion of reflecting upon their own thoughts, and by their answer to engage them in such as are good. The captious and malicious questions of deceitful and pharisaical hearts, are very contrary to this discreet and charitable disposition.

“ 4. And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go;”

There is, in wicked persons, a silence proceeding from pride, malice, impotence, dissimulation, and craft; but it cannot hide their heart from Him who sees the inmost recesses of it. One ought to have no manner of regard to them, when an opportunity of doing good works presents itself. Let this hand, which gives such sovereign relief, be extended over my heart, O Jesus, and heal its spiritual dropsy, the swelling of its pride, the fulness of its corruption, and its greediness and thirst after earthly things.

“ 5. And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath-day?
6. And they could not answer him again to these things.”

The meekness and goodness of our blessed Saviour shows itself on all occasions. He instructs, without insulting; he sees the disorder and confusion of these proud spirits, without exposing it; and he reduces them to silence, without desiring to triumph over them. One cannot too often occasion men to reflect upon the depravity of their heart, so manifest

in their being unwilling to allow charity to do that for the glory of God and the salvation of their neighbour, which a small temporal interest causes them to do without the least hesitation.

SECT. II.—*The lowest place is to be chosen. The Poor are to be invited.*

“7. ¶ And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them,”

Corrupt nature inclines us always to prefer ourselves to others, and to appropriate to ourselves the best of every thing. Pride, which is the principle from whence this external preference proceeds, is the dropsy which Christ would cure in these guests. When quality, custom, or laws, have regulated and settled places in public assemblies, a man may then take them, but he must not love them. When nothing of this nature is settled, the law of humility and the love of order are the only judges of what is proper.

“8. When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;”

To take the highest place when it is not our due, is a piece of vanity which is plain and visible; obstinately to refuse it, is another instance of the same vice, though it be more private and concealed. Humility takes as much care to avoid the ostentation of an affected refusal, as the open seeking a superior place. This parable does immediately relate to the outward behaviour: but the thing signified thereby is inward humility, which prefers itself to none, and

is not at all ambitious of the first place in the esteem of others.

“ 9. And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.”

Shame generally attends the proud person. It is neither the fear of being humbled, nor the desire of being exalted by men, which ought to divert us from seeking the chief places; but the knowledge of our own vileness, the love of order, the spirit of mortification, a hatred of pride, a true sense of humility, and a desire to conform ourselves to the example of Christ, and to obey his gospel. It is one thing to hate the punishment of the proud, and another to act by their spirit: the latter is always bad, the former not.

“ 10. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.”

That which, in the parable, is no other than a vice, is a virtue in that which is signified by it. Human glory is altogether unworthy of a Christian’s love; the glory which comes from God is that alone which is worthy of his ambition. The only means to attain to this glory is humility: but humility expects it only from the pure bounty of God, desires it only for his glory, and receives it only by abasing itself, and, as it were, losing itself in him. Lord, humble my heart, and cause it to love that place which belongs to it, that it may not become unworthy of that which thou hast merited for it.

“ 11. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased ; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

This is the unchangeable conduct of God in respect of the humble and the proud. The carnal man will not comprehend it ; because he prefers the vain and momentary glory which is offered him by the world, before the substantial and eternal glory which God has promised him. It does by no means belong to man to exalt himself, since of himself he has nothing which is good, since he knows not whether he shall always retain the good he has, and since nothing is more deceitful than the judgment which he forms concerning himself. Let us wait with patience one moment ; the day of eternity will discover to us both our own heart and that of others.

“ 12. ¶ Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours ; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee.”

Our charity must be perfectly disinterested, if we desire to be recompensed by him who has not the least interest in loving us. To make sometimes entertainments and presents, in order to keep up a good understanding and Christian friendship, is to serve the purposes of charity ; and God will place them to account, if charity be likewise the soul and principle of them. They are entirely lost as to heaven, if we have only earthly views of interest, pleasure, vanity, ambition, or human friendship. There are very few who regulate these expenses by Christian motives ; as if it were not necessary to be Christians, even in the most common actions of civil life.

“ 13. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind :”

A man finds his friends, his brethren, his kinsmen, and his neighbours, in these poor people; since he finds in them Jesus Christ, who is all things to those who are entirely his. He who consecrates to these miserable wretches his estate, his cares, his labours, his services, and his life, may perhaps be counted a fool: but how much true wisdom lies concealed under this seeming folly! This is a mystery of faith: we must believe in it something very different from what we see.

“ 14. And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”

Happy that person who receives not from men the recompense of his charity! God himself will be his recompense. We should think ourselves happy in being able to purchase the friendship of some great prince, the heir of a rich crown, by lending him in his wants, and when he is in no condition to repay us. The poor are so many distressed princes; the kingdom of heaven is theirs: and therefore to lend them in their necessities, is to make our own fortune. What do we not venture upon a deceitful hope, upon an uncertain futurity? Here every thing is sure, every thing is certain, since the gospel is answerable for it, since Christ himself is security for the poor, and since, whatever we lend to them is lent to him in their persons.

SECT. III.—*The Parable of the Guests who excused themselves.*

“ 15. ¶ And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”

He who thinks with faith on the treasures and delights of heaven, is not able to contain his joy. Jesus speaks to all present concerning the eternal reward; and only one single person seems to open his heart, and to feed upon it. The bread of the kingdom of God, is God himself: it is with him, as being eternal truth, that those shall be fed and satisfied who have fed Jesus Christ in his members. It is by the infusion, communication, and intimate union of the sovereign good with the soul, that those shall be eternally nourished, who have given part of their perishing goods to the poor. Blessed is he who opens his heart and his purse to them !

“ 16. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many : ”

How highly is the honour of eating at a king’s table esteemed in the world ? But that God should invite a sinner to the delights of his glory, and to the participation of his joy—what transcendent goodness and mercy is this ! Men invite others to their table, because they have occasion for them to be subservient to their pleasure, their interest, or to some other designs, which plainly show their wants : God alone, happy in himself, communicates his good things out of pure bounty and an abundant fulness.

“ 17. And sent his servant at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come ; for all things are now ready.”

God sends his own Son, clothed in the form of a servant, to invite and conduct us to the heavenly supper. The time of walking by faith, in order to go to this supper, is chiefly since the incarnation, death, and resurrection of our blessed Saviour. All things are ready, because he has done all things necessary to our salvation, has merited all things for us, is himself the banquet, and is gone to prepare the place for us which we are to have. Let us therefore go to this divine banquet with all the fervency of our faith.

“ 18. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.”

Diverse obstacles to salvation are here denoted: First, idleness, pleasure, and the pride of riches. Can we possibly look upon wealth as a real good, if it be a hinderance of our salvation? And is it not certainly so, when the heart is entirely fixed upon it, taken up with it, makes it its treasure, and is possessed thereby; insomuch that it loses all relish of heavenly enjoyments, and can find no time to use any endeavours to render itself in any measure worthy of them? Men make a necessity of that which proceeds from nothing but their passions; as if the only true necessity did not consist in opposing their passions, and sacrificing them to their eternal happiness.

“ 19. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.”

The second obstacle to salvation here mentioned, contains under it the curiosity of the mind and senses, labour, employment, and business. What are the

generality of men, who are entirely taken up with these things, but mere beasts, bearing a most heavy yoke, slaves to those whom they serve, always stooping toward the earth, seeing nothing but that, and wholly employed in moving and turning it up? How innocent soever any employment may be in itself, it ceases to be so when it hinders us from thinking on God, when it fills up our whole life, busies our whole mind, and causes us to forget that we were made for heaven, and that the means of attaining thereto is our only necessary affair. Too much leisure and too much business, are both equally dangerous with respect to salvation.

“ 20. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”

The third obstacle to salvation here mentioned, comprehends the lust of the flesh, too great a fondness towards our family, pleasures, disorders, excesses, &c. The sacred bond of marriage, which ought to be a help towards salvation, is but too often the utter ruin of it. If a woman, given to Adam in a state of innocence by the hand of God himself, was, notwithstanding, the cause of his fall, by means of a fondness and compliance contrary to his duty; who has not reason to be afraid, lest he should meet with a snare in marriage through the bad disposition of his own heart. These ties of flesh and blood are the most difficult to be broken. The persons mentioned before, excuse themselves civilly: this man bluntly declares, he cannot come. Some damn themselves in a rude and brutal, others in a civil and well-bred manner.

“ 21. So that servant came, and showed his Lord

these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind."

The contempt of God's word provokes his justice. We must acknowledge ourselves to be poor, incapable of doing any good, blind, and sinners, if we desire to partake of the divine mercy. It is a great misfortune, but very difficultly owned as such, for a man to have any thing in this life on which he may set his affections, and wherein he may place a kind of felicity. It is, on the contrary, a great happiness, and as difficult to be comprehended, for a man to have nothing in this world which may make him love it. We are always ready to go to the heavenly banquet, when we are thoroughly sensible of the poverty, misery, and dangers of this life. It is much easier to make poverty than riches a means of salvation. A rich man, who would be saved, must wean and disengage his heart from his wealth: a poor man, the more he loves his poverty, the fitter is he for heaven, and the greater right has he thereto.

" 22. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room."

Every place shows that the kingdom of heaven is for the poor. The gospel is very seldom preached, or instruction given to them, without some fruit. It is proper to them to be of a teachable and open disposition, and fit to receive the impression of the truths of salvation: whereas the minds of the rich, who are proud and conceited, are generally unteachable, shut up, and hardened against the word of God, and against his ministers. The places in heaven are

numbered, and yet there is always room for those who will work out their salvation. The bosom of God is the place where this heavenly banquet is prepared: it is there that we are to be filled with his good things. How can either room or provisions ever be wanting there, since we are to be in God, and to feed upon him!

“ 23. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

Observe here the mercy, freeness, and efficacy of the divine vocation! From what errors, what forgetfulness of God, does he not recover those sinners, to whom he has determined to make known his truth, and to open his celestial mansions? He seeks those who fly from him, overcomes those who resist him, and causes those who hate to love him. Void of all understanding is he who despairs either of his goodness or his power, in what abyss of sin and misery soever he finds himself. There is no empty space in the house of God: none of the elect, who are the fulness of the body of Christ, shall be wanting to it; all his designs concerning them will certainly be accomplished. Vouchsafe, Lord, to draw our rebellious hearts toward thyself: exercise, we beseech thee, that sort of violence upon us, which does not force and necessitate our wills, but sets them perfectly at liberty, and heals them.

“ 24. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

He who loves the world, and the things which are in the world, will be excluded from the heavenly supper, unless he disengage his affections from them

before the appointed hour. This is a dreadful sentence, but such as is executed every day and every moment. There are four sorts of grace vouchsafed to sinners, and denoted here by these four terms : Sinners bade or invited, ver. 16. called, ver. 17. brought, ver. 21. compelled, ver. 23. The grace of invitation and of outward call is not sufficient : none ever enter who are not either brought and led by the gentle and powerful hand of grace, or even compelled by an extraordinary conduct of God, which breaks their chains, and tears them from their passions. It is an unsearchable judgment of God, that he should only invite and call those who were nearest, and whose hearts were not set upon any evil thing, leaving them to their own inclinations and desires ; and that he should cause others to be brought in, and, as it were, compelled, who seem to have been less fit, at a greater distance, and in no manner of expectation of such a favour. My God, thou art the sovereign Master of our destiny, it belongs solely to thee to dispose of it as thou pleasest !

SECT. IV.—*Relations are to be hated. The Cross must be borne. A Tower to be built. A King to be fought with. Salt having no savour.*

“ 25. ¶ And there went great multitudes with him : and he turned, and said unto them, 26. If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

It is a law, that we should hate our kindred, and whatever is derived from Adam, whenever they divert

us from following Christ: but then this hatred does not consist in wishing them any ill, but in consenting to lose them, rather than lose the supreme good. Are there many in this disposition to abandon their life, and that which is most dear to them, rather than to forsake God in disobeying his law? Are we in this disposition ourselves, we who so often prefer a mere trifle before him? He builds without a foundation who pretends to be the servant of God without loving him; or to love him as he ought, without preferring him above all other things whatsoever.

“ 27. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”

How can we presume to call ourselves Christians, when we live in ease and pleasure instead of bearing our cross; when we follow the world, which is the enemy of Christ, and conform ourselves to its manners, instead of following our Head, and practising his gospel? No man can be saved who is not the disciple of Christ; and no man is his disciple, unless, being convinced of the truth of his doctrine, he loves his precepts, applies himself to the observation of them, makes them the rule of his life and behaviour, and glories in having him for his Master, and in imitating his example. My God, if this be so, how few Christians are there, how few true disciples of Christ!

“ 28. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?”

To build the tower of our salvation will cost us very dear; nay, we must lay out all we have on this work, at least we must be ready to do it in the dis-

position of our heart. We are but little concerned about this matter, when we take no time to consider of it, to examine the state we intend to embrace, to weigh the obligations thereof, and above all, those of Christianity, which is our first calling. Retirement, repose, prayer, and meditation upon the fundamental truths of piety, are necessary in order thoroughly to understand the holiness of the Christian religion, and our own obligations and duties. Men would fain be Christians at too cheap a rate, and for this reason they are none at all: and they entertain that foolish desire, only because they have never seriously thought of this matter.

“ 29. Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, 30. Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.”

Those who have either renounced the true religion, or not performed the duties of it, will be exposed to a public shame, and a universal confusion at the day of judgment. They run the risk of making apostates rather than Christians, who baptize adult persons before they have well instructed them in the faith and duties of Christianity. Without doing this, they do not properly list soldiers into the service of Christ, but only prepare deserters from it. From whence do the frequent relapses of sinners proceed, if it be not from our not allowing them time to become true penitents, and by prayer and retirement to settle and confirm themselves in the knowledge and love of true piety and religion?

“ 31. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth,

whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? 32. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace."

This comparison intimates to us, that the life of a Christian is a state of continual war; that there is no virtue without fighting; and that we must be always ready and prepared. The devil, the world, and our own passions, are the enemies against whom we are to fight; but of whom we must never desire any conditions of peace. Our consultation is prayer; our counsel is Jesus Christ; Christian virtues are our army; and the all-powerful grace of our blessed Saviour is our strength.

"33. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

To forsake all, in order to follow Christ, is a counsel of perfection, and an apostolical virtue. To renounce all, in order to be Christ's disciple, is a precept necessary to salvation. We renounce all, when we do not set our heart and affections upon any thing here below; when we are ready to forsake every thing at the command of God; when we make use of it, like travellers, only as provision for our journey toward our own country, and are far from looking upon it as a blessing fit to detain us, and to take possession of our heart. This is a disposition as necessary to make a good Christian, as money is to build a tower, or an army to fight a battle.

"34. ¶ Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? 35. It is

neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

A lukewarm or a corrupt Christian, is more insupportable to the eyes of God than a heathen. To what purpose is an indiscreet zeal of making proselytes, either by baptism, or repentance, or the priesthood, without observing the proper rules for trying the spirits, whether they are of God; but only to render them worthy of a greater condemnation? There is nothing more corrupt than a wicked Christian, a false penitent, or a priest without vocation and piety. Of how great importance is it, that bishops, missionaries, &c. should value more the having a small number of good Christians, true penitents, and holy priests, than a great number of such as are fit for nothing, but to dishonour the church, and to people hell!

CHAPTER XV.

SECT. I.—*The Sheep and the Piece of Silver found.
Joy in heaven over one Penitent.*

" 1. THEN drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him."

Christ draws sinners to him, and does not treat them as persons unworthy to hear his word. To hear it with pleasure, is one of the first marks of conversion. To what end did our blessed Saviour come into the world, if it were not that the sick might seek their Physician, that the blind might draw near to the light, the ignorant to truth, and

the miserable to mercy? To draw near to Christ by faith, prayer, love, and meditation upon his word, is almost every thing which is to be done in this life.

“2. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

Pride corrupts the best principles. We ought to avoid sinners on some occasions, either through fear of being corrupted, or in obedience to the church, which would put them to shame, in order to their spiritual good. But we must not avoid them either out of contempt or ill-nature, or to the prejudice of the duties either of Christian charity or the pastoral care. Envy and ignorance in the ways of God, make men find an occasion of scandal or offence in the most edifying charity. An envenomed heart puts a bad construction upon the very best actions of its neighbour.

“3. ¶ And he spake this parable unto them, saying, 4. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?”

Several duties of a good pastor towards a soul which is gone astray, are here denoted. The first is, to have, in some measure, a greater regard and concern for it, than for those which are safe in the fold. The second is, to seek it with care and perseverance. As a mother never shows herself more a mother, than when she has lost her child: so a pastor cannot better show the bowels of his charity, than by his zeal and tenderness for sinners. A hireling may perhaps be a little diligent in seeking and bringing

back a sinner; but none but a pastor and a father seeks until he find him.

“ 5. And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”

The third duty of a pastor is, to support the infirmities of souls with a discreet mildness, regulated by the divine law; to be sensible of their wounds through a compassion which laments them; and to bear their sins as his own, by an humble and fervent repentance. The fourth duty of a pastor is, joyfully to undergo the labour which is necessary to bring souls back to their duty. Nothing is burdensome to charity; nothing is difficult or troublesome to him who loves souls for the sake of God, and considers how great things Christ has done for them. A woman becomes a mother, only by bringing forth; and she cannot bring forth without pain. This is an emblem of a true pastor.

“ 6. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

The fifth duty of a pastor is, to manifest by his joy his charity for sinners, and his value for souls. A soul is a kingdom. As many as we can bring back to God, are so many kingdoms reconquered: and nothing equals the joy of a conqueror. We must ultimately refer this joy to Christ, since the victory and conquest proceed from him. The sixth duty of a pastor is, to excite others to return thanks and praise to God, for the graces which souls have received by his ministry. It belongs properly to the church, to praise God for the conversion of sinners;

because it is to form her body that he delivers them from the power of the devil; and because he hears only the voice of his spouse, and of those who pray in and with her, and in her house.

“ 7. I say unto you, That likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”

It is reasonable there should be joy in heaven over a repenting sinner, since it is for heaven, and by the assistance of heaven, that this miracle is wrought on earth. The church triumphant and the church militant, are but one heart and soul: and the same spirit, which prays for the increase and accomplishment of God’s kingdom, in the saints of heaven and in those of earth, rejoices also in them both, to see that it is forming, and that the kingdom of the devil declines, by the loss of those members which are torn from him.

“ 8. ¶ Either what woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?”

There are three common sources of sin in the church, and in particular sinners. 1. Want of knowledge, ignorance of duty, and weakness of faith. 2. Public disorders, and corruption of manners in the house of God. 3. The negligence of pastors.—There are, on the contrary, three sources likewise of reformation in the church, and of the conversion of sinners. The first is, “ To light the candle,” that is, to illuminate and revive faith by the means of good books, and above all, by inspiring the soul with the

love of God's word, according to that of the royal prophet, " Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path;" and by propagating the knowledge of the mysteries of religion, and of the duties of Christianity. The second is, to purge the church from the pernicious maxims of corrupt morality, and from public disorders. The third is, to give to particular churches enlightened and zealous pastors, and such as may labour with an indefatigable care in the conversion and sanctification of souls.

" 9. And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost."

The piece of silver had not been found, if it had not been sought. The sheep had never returned to the fold, if it had not been brought back. How then should the sinner ever surrender himself into the hands of God—how should the heretic ever return to the church, unless God himself vouchsafe to seek him, unless a good pastor take the pains to carry this sheep, which had strength enough to go astray, but cannot take one step towards a return ! It is thy grace, O Jesus, which gives this occasion of joy to thy church; it is also to thy glory that she ultimately refers it all !

" 10. Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

The conversion of sinners is the joy of angels as well as of men. The more a man is a friend of God, the more sensible is he of every thing which relates to his interests. He who is unconcerned about them,

has reason to mistrust the state and condition of his own heart. It is a torment to the devil, by reason of his envy, to behold the holiness of the just, and the conversion of sinners; the charity of the angels causes them to take part therein, by their assistance, their joy, and their thanksgiving. Woe to those priests, who, being angels by their ministry, become no better than devils through their envy and jealousy; or who, instead of rejoicing, are troubled at the good which does not pass through their hands!

SECT. II.—*The Prodigal Son.*

“ 11. ¶ And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.”

The prodigal son is an emblem of a sinner. How dangerous is it for us to desire to be at our own disposal, to live in a state of independency, and to be governed only by ourselves! It is the greatest mark of the wrath of God, for him to hearken to this proud inclination of our corrupt heart, and to leave us to ourselves. What is the will of man, light and inconstant as it is, if it be not ruled and governed by the unchangeable and supreme will of the Creator! It withdrew itself from his guidance and direction even when it was sound, and, by so doing, impaired and ruined its health; and therefore, now that it is blind, sick, and fainting, how extremely does it want the support of his divine hand!

“ 13. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.”

Man cannot be guided long by himself, without finding, by fatal experience, that he is under the direction of a very blind and deceitful guide. The misery of a sinner has its degrees, and he generally arrives step by step at the highest pitch of it. The first degree of his misery is, that he loses sight of God, and removes at a distance from him. There is an infinite distance between the love of God and the love of ourselves ; and yet we pass in a moment from the one to the other ! The second degree of the sinner's misery is, that the love of God no longer reigning in his heart, carnal love and desire must necessarily reign therein, and corrupt all his actions. The third degree is, that he loses all the spiritual riches of his soul. Self-love is a very bad guardian, and a great waster of the divine gifts. He only who bestows them on us, can secure them ; and we endeavour to lose them, if we pretend to keep them without him.

“ 14. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land ; and he began to be in want.”

The fourth degree of a sinner's misery is, that, having forsaken God, and lost his grace and his love, he can find nothing elsewhere, but poverty, misery, and want. It is just, that he who thought he could be happy without God, should find, at a distance from him, nothing but affliction, necessity, and oppression. How empty is that soul which no longer enjoys the bread of truth ! What a famine is there in that heart, which is no longer nourished with charity !

“ 15. And he went and joined himself to a citizen

of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine."

The fifth degree of the sinner's misery is, that he renders himself a slave to the devil. The farther a man removes from the supreme and sovereign Good, the more likewise does darkness overspread his understanding, the more heavy does the yoke of concupiscence sit upon his will, and the more absolutely does the will surrender itself up into the hands of the only master whom he deserves to meet with, who would not continue in the service of Jesus Christ. We are never sensible of this misery, until God makes us feel it. The sixth degree of it is, that the sinner finds by experience the hardship and rigour of his slavery. 'There is no master so cruel as the devil ; no yoke so heavy as that of sin ; and no slavery so mean and vile, as for a man to be a slave to his own carnal, shameful, and brutish passions.

" 16. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat : and no man gave unto him."

The seventh degree of the sinner's misery is, that, having deprived himself of every thing which he could lawfully and innocently possess, he, in his hunger, feeds upon a thousand criminal desires of worldly pleasures and riches, wherein he imagines he shall find something to satisfy his lusts. Miserable is he, in not obtaining that which he desires ; and yet more miserable would he be, if he did obtain it ! The pleasures of the world are the pleasures of swine, always stooping toward the earth, always wallowing in filth and mire.

" 17. And when he came to himself, he said,

How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"

Let us observe here the several degrees of a sinner's conversion. The first is, that he knows his misery, and the corruption of his own heart: but how should he ever know this, if the light which he deserted first, did not first return toward him, and come to seek him in the abyss of his darkness? We cannot "come to ourselves," unless God return to us; as we are far from ourselves, when we are far from God. It is the utmost misery, when God permits the sinner to be lulled asleep in the criminal pleasure of sin, without being awakened by any affliction; or when a continual and undisturbed prosperity make him lose the very remembrance of the true and substantial felicity. It is a beginning of happiness, for a man thoroughly to comprehend the misery of sin, and to envy the happiness of those who serve God.

"18. I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee,"

The second degree of the sinner's conversion is, that he resolves to forsake sin, and the occasion thereof. A man cannot forsake them both too soon, though it were only through an imperfect motive of interest, and more from a sense of the grievous consequences of sin, than from a hatred of sin itself. Grace purifies all in the sequel. The third degree of conversion is, when a sinner turns towards God, looks upon him as his Father, entertains a desire to return to him, takes a resolution of doing it, and is convinced that he must not delay it one moment, be-

cause he cannot too soon cease to be miserable, or, without the greatest folly, by a delay run the hazard of being so eternally. The fourth degree of the conversion of a sinner is, his making a confession of his sin, and beginning that confession by a name of love, “my Father;” because the love of God is the foundation of true repentance. The chief motive to the hatred of sin is, because it is contrary to the goodness of God, and because he, who is the best of all fathers, is offended thereby.

“ 19. And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.”

The fifth degree of the sinner’s conversion is, his humbling himself, as being altogether unworthy of the grace and mercy of God. It is love and the Spirit of adoption, which give us a right to call God our Father: we lose this right, when we lose that love, and when that Spirit is withdrawn from us. The acknowledgment of our own unworthiness is an acceptance of the humiliation which is due to a sinner. We love it, when we love God; because it is the appointment of his justice, which is God himself. The sixth degree of the conversion of a sinner is, his submitting to penance. Whoever will not do it, renounces all claim to the mercy of God, which is only for true penitents. The best penance a man can perform, is to be very willing to endure an humbling state, to be treated as a sinner, by being deprived of those advantages which are due only to the innocent, and to lead a painful and laborious course of life, continually dependent, and wholly employed in his Master’s work, like that of a servant.

“ 20. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

In the seventh place, a true penitent, how earnest soever he may be to be reconciled to God, does not leave his state of life to go to desire reconciliation, until after he has settled and confirmed himself in the dispositions above-mentioned. In the eighth place, God with his grace prevents the penitent in all the steps he takes in order to return to him. He is careful to receive him with a fatherly tenderness, since it is his goodness which causes him to return. He pours into the heart of true penitents so much comfort and delight, and caresses them in such a manner, as inspires them with a holy confidence of the pardon of their sins and of reconciliation, denoted as here, by the holy kiss. A pastor to whom a penitent comes as to a father, ought to have the heart and deportment of one, and imitate him whose place he holds.

“ 21. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

The ninth degree of a sinner’s conversion is, his openly owning his sin, and bearing the shame of his ingratitude. The particular marks of God’s favour and goodness towards a true penitent, never cause him to lay aside the resolution he has taken of humbling himself. He is faithful to his promises, and it is even an effect of the goodness of God that he is so. How unworthy soever he may acknowledge himself to be called a child of God, yet he cannot

forbear calling him Father: it is a contest betwixt confidence and humility; the former restores what the latter takes away.

“ 22. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:”

In the tenth place, the more a penitent humbles himself, and the more unworthy he thinks himself of every thing, the higher does God raise him, and heap upon him the greater benefits. He treats him as his son, so far is he from depriving him of the name, and giving him time to take that of a servant. In the eleventh place, to the grace of reconciliation, God adds abundance of other graces, with which he covers the nakedness of a converted sinner, clothing him with Jesus Christ, his righteousness, his merits, his virtues, &c. In the twelfth, he seals this new covenant with a lively impression of his Spirit, which is the seal of adoption, a pledge of the inheritance in heaven, and an earnest of the eternal promises. In the thirteenth place, he gives him such graces and assistances as enable him to walk in the way of his commandments, and in the practice of good works, to secure himself from serpents, and to tread upon scorpions, which are the devil and his temptations.

“ 23. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:”

The fourteenth degree of the conversion of a sinner is, that, being reconciled, he has a right to be present at the Christian sacrifice: and, in the fifteenth place, to be fed with the flesh of Christ, which is the seal of reconciliation on the part of the church. My God, what joy must necessarily arise in a soul

which has recovered Christ, which feeds upon him, which receives in him the fruit and grace of his mysteries, and which tastes anew this heavenly gift ! Come, sinners, taste and see how sweet the Lord is. Blessed is he who hopes in him !

“ 24. For this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.”

The sixteenth degree of a sinner’s conversion is, that, for the time to come, he leads the life of a person newly found and raised from the dead. He must not live, either to the world, which caused him to lose himself; or to sin, which give him death; or to himself, who could neither find nor raise himself again : but he must live to Him who was made man on purpose to seek him, who died to raise him to life, and who vouchsafes to become his food, his passover, and his banquet. Let his life, therefore, be one continued act of thanksgiving.

“ 25. Now his elder son was in the field : and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.”

The seventeenth effect of the conversion of a sinner is, the joy of the church, which shows itself more on this occasion, than for the fidelity of a just person; because it is a double triumph, to see the devil’s power diminished, and the number of the servants of God increased. This is to imitate God, who infuses more sensible comforts into the heart of a new convert, than into that of one who has always served him. This is not the proper place for the reward of souls, but only for the gaining them over to religion. The conduct of God towards the strong

is severe and rigorous; he suffers them to toil and labour, far from the comforts of their Father's house, and exposed to heat and cold. But they shall be abundantly rewarded by the possession of the inheritance.

“ 26. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.”

God comforts his church by the return of souls which were thought to be lost. He does not convert them all at once, that he may from time to time renew her gratitude and acknowledgment, that he may give her comfort under the losses which she sustains, and that he may encourage the weak by the sight of what his grace continually performs in souls. We ought to be sensible of his designs, and to have the same dispositions with the church.

“ 28. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.”

The eighteenth and last degree of the conversion of true penitents is, their enjoying such graces as are capable of raising envy in the minds of the just, or of the imperfect, or of those who are but little instructed in the ways of God. The most righteous persons are not exempt from these temptations. God is the sole master of his own gifts; and he dispenses them always with the greatest wisdom: it belongs to us to adore his conduct and designs. He is not less ready to support the righteous in their troubles, and to cure their imperfections, than to assist the weak in their beginnings; but he applies

himself to each in such a manner as is most agreeable to their state and condition.

“ 29. And he, answering, said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:”

Those who have laboured much and for a long time in the church, ought carefully to secure themselves against one temptation, namely, the imagining that God is in their debt. There is danger in employing our thoughts too much upon the good we do, in reckoning up the years of our service, in desiring to be rewarded in this life, and to enjoy the conveniences and pleasures of it. Let us leave this matter to God, and not pretend to account with him.

“ 30. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.”

Condescension towards the weak is subject to be censured and blamed. The readiness with which God goes to meet them, is above the thoughts and imaginations of men. We ought to have more compassion towards sinners, than indignation at their sins, and to speak of them neither with severity nor with contempt. We must avoid making comparisons of this nature: it is the grace of God which distinguishes us; it is humility which preserves his gifts.

“ 31. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.”

The righteous, being united to God, have a right to the heavenly inheritance by his grace. He who thoroughly comprehends how great the favour of the

divine adoption is, and that which Christian hope encourages a child of God to expect in the world to come, looks upon every thing else as nothing. Those are for selling beforehand part of the eternal inheritance, who desire temporal rewards or satisfactions. That person will never envy the happiness of those who enjoy them, who thoroughly understands these two sentences—that God is ever with him as his Father, and that God is his as his patrimony and inheritance. This is what God speaks to his children, as often as faith speaks it to them in meditation and prayer. Whoever, in the like temptations, has recourse to these two truths, will certainly receive from them abundance of strength and consolation.

“ 32. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

These words are repeated by the father of the family. Of so great importance is it, to make it evident, that a sinner is dead in the eyes of faith, because God whom he forsakes is the life of his soul, as his soul is the life of his body. A Christian’s sin is a brother’s death: and in proportion to our concern for this, is our joy at his resurrection. Let us have a brotherly heart towards our brethren; since God has that of a father towards his children, and seems to be afflicted at their loss, and to rejoice at their being found again, as if they were necessary to his happiness.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECT. I.—*The Parable of the unjust Steward.*

“ 1. AND he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.”

We are all the stewards of God, sent into the world to employ, to our own salvation, the riches and talents which God has put into our hands, and which are by no means our own. He alone is truly rich, and no man has any thing, but what he has received from him, as a sum trusted with him, and for which he must pay interest. What will become of him who has been so far from improving it to his master’s advantage, that he has wasted even the principal? The only reason why we are so apt to do this is, because we do not frequently enough reflect upon the moment when we shall be accused and judged. Not to use it according to the design and intention of God, is no other than to waste it.

“ 2. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.”

There are three things at the death of a reprobate which are very terrible:—1. His being obliged to appear with a guilty conscience before holiness itself. 2. His having an exact account to give of his whole life, and of whatever he has received. 3. His seeing himself deprived of all for ever.—The most holy persons in the world will be accused, examined, and

judged, concerning the use they have made of their natural talents, and of supernatural gifts, which both belong to God; concerning the employment of their understanding, time, and wealth; and concerning the use which they either have or have not made of Jesus Christ, of his graces and mysteries, and of the sacraments, and all the helps of religion. Let us therefore make use of all these talents, as persons who must give a strict account of them.

“ 3. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.”

What remains to a soul which has lost God and his grace, but only sin and the consequences thereof, a proud poverty, and a slothful indigence; that is, a universal inability as to labour, prayer, and every good work conducting to salvation? He is exceeding rich in the sight of God, who knows perfectly how to pray to him, all true riches being obtained by prayer. It is a double poverty to want every thing, and to be able to ask nothing.

“ 4. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.”

Few persons are seriously concerned who shall receive their soul after their death, and supply its wants; but the generality of men are very earnest in seeking a retreat for this miserable body which must rot. There is nothing which they are unwilling to do, no industry which they will not employ, to secure themselves from temporal poverty; that of the soul is the only poverty of which they are insensible, and the only reason why they are so, is because they are

ignorant of the nature and consequences of it. Make me sensible of my poverty, O my God, my sovereign good, the possession of whom alone gives the true riches, and the loss of whom is the only real poverty.

“ 5. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? 6. And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.”

When we know not how to pray ourselves, we must engage the prayers of the poor, who will speak to God in our behalf. The last refuge of a sinner is alms, which is the art of turning our master’s goods innocently to our own advantage, and making to ourselves friends of his. Heaven belongs to the poor in a peculiar manner; it is their patrimony and inheritance. Alms are likewise instrumental to the salvation of the poor themselves: for we thereby make them less indebted to God, by hindering them from falling into murmuring, impatience, despair, &c. and giving them occasion to praise God, to adore his providence, and to put their confidence therein.

“ 7. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.”

A Christian ought to serve his neighbour out of a pure and disinterested charity, to give alms for the sake of Christ alone, and to assist souls in discharging their debts, by contributing either to their conversion or sanctification. Alms spiritual or temporal, though defective, imperfect, and done for our own interest, are notwithstanding beneficial to the imper-

fect and to great sinners; because they engage the poor and pious souls to solicit the mercy of God for them.

“ 8. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”

The children of this world are wiser in the management of affairs which are of no moment at all, than Christians are in that which alone is necessary. The use which the former make of their reason, to carry on their worldly designs, will condemn the little use which the latter make of their faith in the business of salvation. It is by this faith that these are children of light; and it is by leaving it useless and unemployed that they fall back into darkness. True wisdom consists in knowing how to make every thing instrumental to our salvation. We never want means to save ourselves, when we earnestly will and desire it. Faith finds remedies and assistances in the greatest poverty; because it can make a treasure of poverty itself.

“ 9. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

The great secret in the holy policy of rich sinners, is to make to themselves friends in heaven by giving alms. This is the only way to sanctify riches, which are almost always either the fruit or the seed of unrighteousness and injustice, and which, by this means, become the fruit of charity, and the seed of glory. Whenever we squander them away in foolish and

criminal expenses, we make enemies of them, who will accuse us at the tribunal of God. But we make them friends, advocates, and protectors against the great day, when we distribute them among the poor. It is our part to entreat, and, as it were, court the poor; so far should we be from treating them roughly and with contempt, and from disheartening and tiring them out by our delays and mortifying usage.

SECT. II.—*The being faithful in that which is least. God and Mammon.*

“ 10. He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.”

That which is little is little; but to be always faithful even in the least things, is somewhat which is very great. It is dangerous, voluntarily to commit the least faults, because they may possibly have very great and fatal consequences. Avarice, and the ill use of earthly riches, is an abuse of things of the smallest value; but the love of the world, which is the principle from whence this abuse proceeds, is the source of the greatest evils. A man does not indeed become perfect by alms alone, but it may be the beginning of the highest perfection, and the price of eternal salvation.

“ 11. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”

Such riches as may be acquired by criminal methods, possessed by the most wicked persons, and are extremely valued by the world, cannot possibly be the true riches. Charity in this world, and glory

in the other, are the only riches which we cannot abuse: but earthly riches are almost always abused, without an extraordinary grace. Those things which serve to arm injustice, which are the object of the most violent desire, and the cause and occasion of almost all the evils upon earth; how can such things possibly render a man happy? Lord, either deliver or defend us from the malignity of this sort of riches, which may ruin, but cannot save us.

“ 12. And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?”

Earthly riches are false goods, and foreign to a Christian. His own proper and true wealth is not of this world, any more than himself. The good things of this world are only lent and trusted in our hands, for use and not for enjoyment. As we ourselves are really nothing but what we are in Christ Jesus: so we have no stock nor inheritance but in him. All the rest is foreign to us. We are made Christians, in order to enjoy heaven and eternity; and therefore heavenly and eternal treasures are those alone which are properly our own. Let us weigh, in the balance of faith, the three qualities which our blessed Saviour gives them—“ great,” ver. 10. “ true,” ver. 11. “ our own,” ver. 12. whereas those he ascribes to earthly riches are, that they are little, contemptible, false, and foreign.

“ 13. No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Strange is the blindness of the covetous wretch,

to set mammon in the place of his God ! If we must choose one of these two masters, is there any room to deliberate upon the choice ? It is a real slavery to love riches, to employ all our time and care about them, and to surrender our heart to them. If we have any faith in the word of Christ, let us believe what he here tells us so plainly, that we cannot possibly reconcile the love of God with the love of money ; that God cannot bear a rival in the heart of his creature ; and that we do not love God at all, if we love any thing together with him, which we do not love for his sake.

*SECT. III.—God abhors that which appears great.
Heaven taken by violence. Marriage.*

“ 14. ¶ And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things : and they derided him.”

Truth, when it opposes the love of worldly things, is generally treated with contempt and derision by worldly-minded men. A preacher who strikes at the darling passions, is very unwillingly heard. God will, in his turn, deride and laugh at those who now deride him and laugh at his word. It has the least influence upon covetous persons of all others, because this passion, rendering the heart altogether earthly, extinguishes therein all faith, which has no other object but heavenly and invisible things.

“ 15. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men ; but God knoweth your hearts : for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

How many things do we admire which are an abomination in the sight of God ! How different

is his judgment from that of the world ! And yet it is this latter which men generally applaud, and dare not declare for the former. Of what advantage is it to hypocrites, to attract on themselves praises which are as false as their righteousness ? It is the heart which shall be judged by him who sees the secrets of it : it is by the heart that we must please him. The judgment of men will change, when that of God shall be manifested to their eyes : and it is already made manifest by the gospel to all those who have evangelical eyes.

“ 16. The law and the prophets were until John : since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.”

It is now no longer a time for men to place their glory and religion in a worship wholly figurative, in prophetic ceremonies, and in empty promises ; since the kingdom typified, foretold, and promised, is established upon earth. It is not, therefore, a legal, external, and carnal righteousness, peculiar only to the Jews, which we must now offer to God ; but a Christian, internal, and spiritual righteousness, which consists in charity common to all nations, which alone is worthy of God and his kingdom, which alone is capable of taking it by a holy and generous violence ; an internal worship, which does not exclude the external, but supports, animates, sanctifies, and renders it acceptable to God.

“ 17. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.”

The immutability of the divine word, in relation either to happiness or misery, yields as much comfort to the righteous as it gives despair to the wicked.

Every thing is accomplished and perfected by the coming of the kingdom of God ; the shadows by the light, the figures by the truth, the prophecies by the event, the promises by the effects, the imperfection of the Jewish dispensation by the evangelical perfection, fear by charity, and the law by grace. Without this grace, O Lord, what should I be as long as I live, but only a Jew, intent on the shadow and fashion of this world which passes away, and oppressed under the insupportable yoke of the law ?

“ 18. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery : and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, committeth adultery.”

The indissolubility of marriage is of divine right. The good which the law did not presume to hope for, is become the common law of Christians : the evil which it was forced to tolerate, is intolerable in the church. Men may deceive her by surprise, and impose upon her by false pretences, but they cannot make her approve that which Christ condemns, or condemn that which he approves.

SECT. IV.—*The Parable of the rich Man and Lazarus.*

“ 19. ¶ There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day : ”

It is then certainly true, that for a man to be rich, to be clothed magnificently, to fare sumptuously, and to take no care of the poor, is sufficient to his damnation ; because it is sufficient to hinder him from leading a Christian life. How can we possibly re-

concile a life of repentance, mortification, and the cross, with a soft, sensual, and voluptuous life; the humility and poverty of Christ, with the pride and superfluity of riches; and the love of this present life, of ease, and of the world, with a constant opposition to our passions, with the care of our salvation, and the desire of eternal happiness? A life which is most abhorred by men, on the account of such gross crimes as are plain and visible to the eyes, is, in the sight of God, more supportable sometimes, and less dangerous, than a life which, though entirely heathenish, is covered with an external innocence, and with worldly civility and good breeding.

“ 20. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,”

Poverty, the neglect and desertion of men, afflictions and diseases, are a condition which is very hard and grievous to nature: but how advantageous is it with regard to heaven, how much is it to be preferred before that of a wicked rich man, when God enables us to bear it humbly and patiently by his grace? How many wounds in the soul do these sores of the body heal, when the hand of the sovereign Physician applies them as a remedy to the diseases of the heart?

“ 21. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.”

This representation of the hard-heartedness of a rich man, and of the patience of a holy beggar, contains in it an important lesson, which deserves well to be studied both by rich and poor. This rich man cannot plead that he is oppressed with the multitude of the poor, for this beggar is alone; or that he is at

a distance from him, for he is at his very gate; or that his misery is unknown to him, for it is exposed to his eyes: neither can he say that he might work, for his weakness forces him to lie on the ground; or that he was troublesome, for he speaks not one word; or that he wanted a great deal, since he would have been contented only with crumbs; nor lastly, can he pretend either that his servants took care of him, since not one of them relieves him; or that nobody put him in mind of this object, since his very dogs do it by their example, easing this poor wretch as much as they are able. We cannot, without indignation, read in the gospel this instance of hard-heartedness: but do we not, almost every day, behold, in the world, instances of the like nature without being affected by them? We there frequently see rich men, who are less sensible than beasts of the misery of the poor, who look upon them as no better than beasts, and have even less care and concern for them than they have for these.

“ 22. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;”

The poor have three advantages: 1. That they do not set their hearts so much upon this life. 2. That they are sooner delivered from it, by reason of the miseries of the body. 3. That they find a new, blessed, and immortal life, in the bosom of God, which is the mansion of his children.—On the contrary, the rich, who live wickedly, are exposed to a threefold misfortune: 1. That they make themselves chains, which bind them more strongly, and for a longer time, to the love of a life which serves only

to multiply their sins. 2. That they leave it with regret. 3. That they fall from one death into another.—What joy must it be to a man, at the end of a miserable but short life, to find the bosom of God open to receive him, in order to his being eternally happy there ! But how great the despair, when, at the conclusion of a life, which pleasures and the fear of death make appear even shorter than it is, a man finds the abyss of hell open to swallow him up, and confine him there to all eternity ! Can we sufficiently reflect upon the difference of these two states ?

“ 23. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

Hell is to the damned not only a prison and a place of death, but likewise a place of torments, which make them feel that there is a God. His justice forces them to open and lift up their eyes toward him, which they had always kept shut against his law, or turned down toward the earth. That small glimmering of light which is left them, whereby they perceive the happiness of the elect, serves only to augment their rage and despair. Lord, open now the eyes of the rich, that they may see the deceitfulness of their riches, and lift up their eyes toward the treasures which are invisible.

“ 24. And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame.”

After death there is no longer any time for fatherly kindness and mercy ; it is in vain to cry out and call upon it in hell. In vain would any one

there implore the assistance of the poor whom he has despised: they are deaf and insensible to the entreaties of those who have been deaf to their groans, and unmoved by their tears. It is very just that he, who has refused to give the crumbs which fell from his table to a poor wretch who desired them, should eternally desire a drop of water, and not receive it. "Blessed is he who considereth the poor and needy, the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble," Psal. xli. 1.

"25. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

The quality of being the children of God, which wicked Christians received in baptism, shall be remembered even in hell, but it will be to their greater damnation. This word "son," which is a word of tenderness, is here used to show us, that God does not punish out of any transport of anger or passion, but out of a calm and sedate love of his own justice. Riches are the good things of reprobates, because they love them passionately, and place all their happiness in them; and because God either seldom permits his elect to enjoy them, or weans their affections from them. It is then a very miserable state and condition for a man to have every thing according to his desire in this world, and quietly to enjoy the pleasures and satisfactions of life; since there needs no more to expose him to an eternal misery. The cross of Christ is the portion of Christians; he who bears it not, has no part in him. Let those tremble with fear, who are unwilling to suffer any thing, and abhor

the very name of mortification and the cross. Happy is that person who makes it his comfort and consolation during the short moment of this present life !

“ 26. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed : so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot ; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.”

How great is the gulf and separation between the saints in heaven and the damned in hell ! and yet we do not reflect upon it. There is no communication between heaven and hell : no more society betwixt the righteous and the wicked : no more mixture of the elect with the reprobate, as in the church on earth. As eternal happiness consists in the perfect communion of God and his elect, of Christ and his members ; so eternal damnation consists in being excommunicated by a general and irrevocable excommunication, deprived for ever of God, of Christ, and of their Spirit, and condemned to the society of devils and their torments to all eternity. The latter have not the least hope of ever leaving that place of punishment, nor the former any fear of falling from their blessed state.

“ 27. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house : 28. For I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.”

The false and selfish compassion of the damned who suffer for others, being an irregular affection, can serve only to increase their sufferings. No prayers nor desires are heard in hell ; because there is no charity to form them. A rich man, who, by leaving

his relations an example of a soft and voluptuous life, and likewise riches to enable them to imitate his example, leaves them two means of damning themselves, is punished in hell for so doing : and it is this punishment which the rich man before us would willingly avoid. One part of damnation consists in being exposed to the reproaches of those whom we have loved in a wrong manner, and thereby made companions in our misery. A rich man, in the torments of hell, will wish that he could, by means of the poor themselves, make satisfaction for the thefts of which he has been guilty with regard to them, by his criminal expenses and hard-heartedness : but it will be then too late.

“ 29. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them.”

We have Moses and the prophets as well as they ; and we have, moreover, Christ and the apostles, the gospel and the apostolical writings, and yet we neglect them. It is a very great instance of negligence for a man not to inform himself of his duty, by reading the word of God whilst he has opportunity to do it ; and it is to expose himself to this reproach, when there is no longer any time to receive the least advantage from it. What is it to hear the word of God as we ought, but to read it with faith, respect, and obedience ; to make it the rule of our opinions, our conduct, and our life ; and to have recourse to it in all our doubts, afflictions, and infirmities, as our only light, consolation, and strength ?

“ 30. And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.”

That man is under a great delusion who waits for

somewhat extraordinary to convert him, and engage him to set about the work of his salvation. The wicked foolishly flatter themselves, that proofs are wanting to their faith; whereas faith is the only thing which is wanting in the midst of the most plain and evident proofs. The Son of God, who came down from heaven to preach repentance to us, and who returned from hell to confirm his preaching, has not been able to persuade us to repent: and yet we imagine, that we should perform this duty, if either an angel came from heaven, or a dead man from the grave, to declare to us the absolute necessity thereof.

“ 31. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

He who gives no credit to the Scripture, gives none to miracles, since it is filled with those of Christ and his apostles. Passion has no other design, but to gain time, and to get rid of those proofs which press too hard upon and incommodate it, under pretence of desiring better: and when such are produced, they serve only to provoke and harden it the more. Christ did raise another Lazarus, and the Jews would fain have sent him back to the grave, and from that very time resolved upon the death of Christ himself. This Saviour rose from the dead, and it was this very resurrection which hardened that perfidious people, and served to fill up the measure of their sins. In vain does the sun of truth shine upon him who is blinded by passion. Let this but cease, and every thing will appear plain. Faith is satisfied with such proofs as God vouchsafes to afford it; incredulity never has enough.

CHAPTER XVII.

SECT. I.—*Offence or Scandal. Forgiveness of Injuries. Increase of Faith.*

“ 1. THEN said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him through whom they come !”

God, to whom nothing is impossible, could prevent all offences or scandals; but he chooses rather to reduce them by his wisdom within the order of his providence, and to make them instrumental to the sanctification of the elect, to the manifestation of his justice, and to his other designs. Whatever good God brings out of evil, can by no means excuse the sinner; because he has no manner of share in that good. A public sin does not always escape a public punishment; because the honour of God’s justice is often, as it were, engaged to inflict it.

“ 2. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.”

Miserable is that person, who, being already oppressed with the burden of his own sins, draws upon himself the guilt of other men’s, by being to them an occasion of offence. It is a terrible judgment upon this sort of sinners, that God does not by an early death prevent the first causes of offence or scandal which they give to souls. Who is there who thoroughly comprehends how great a sin it is to cause one single soul to lose its innocency, by being thereto an occasion of sin? This is sufficient to

draw upon any person the curse of God. But how much more, when the scandal or offence becomes the source of an infinity of others, and causes the loss of a world of souls; as an heresiarch, or an impious person does, who keeps, as it were, a school of libertinism, who justifies and authorizes sin, &c. !

“ 3. ¶ Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.”

It is not sufficient for the charity of a true Christian not to give any occasion of sin to others, it must likewise assist them in reforming their lives, and even forgive the trespasses committed against it. Let us seriously consider these words of our blessed Lord: for it is not without reason that he admonishes us to take heed to ourselves on these occasions. Instead of mildly rebuking our brother, we are apt to brood upon our displeasure at the bottom of our heart, where enmity, bitterness, disgust, contempt, and aversion, are nourished by a thousand disadvantageous thoughts, and malicious reflections, and take deep root therein. All that is gained by rebuking him in a harsh manner, is only to inflame the wound which he has given himself, to render it incurable, and frequently to make us want his pardon who before wanted ours.

“ 4. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.”

Charity and true mercy have no bounds. It is the greatest folly imaginable, to refuse mercy to others, so long as we stand in need of the mercy of God towards ourselves: and who does not stand in

need of it every moment, even to the hour of his death? As the kindness and gentleness of God towards us, is the rule and pattern of that which we owe to others: so our rigour and severity towards others is, as it were, the rule and pattern of that which God will exercise towards us. There is nothing more dangerous to such as have need of an infinite mercy, than to set bounds and limits to their own.

“ 5. ¶ And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”

How necessary is this prayer continually throughout the whole course of our life; and especially when we are to forgive injuries, and to sacrifice to charity the deceitful sweetness of revenge! Faith decays every moment, unless it be supported by prayer. Prayer owes its birth to faith; but faith owes its increase to prayer: and both are a gift of God in every degree. Lord, thou alone canst infuse, preserve, increase, and perfect thy gifts in us, and make them helpful and subservient one to another.

“ 6. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say unto this sycamore-tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.”

Faith is a thing which appears mean and contemptible to the eyes of the carnal man: and yet there is nothing more strong and powerful. Lord, I do not ask this gift of thee, either to pluck up trees by the root, or to remove mountains, but to root out of my heart self-love and concupiscence, that accursed tree which bears nothing but corrupt fruit,

and to sink it in the sea of thy blood. Command, O Lord, and thou shalt be immediately obeyed.

SECT. II.—*We are unprofitable Servants.*

“ 7. But which of you, having a servant ploughing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?”

The church is the field and the flock of the Lord; his ministers are not masters or owners thereof, but labourers and shepherds: and consequently their life is a life of labour, care, and vigilance. This is their portion or task during the day of this life; this is their duty, were there no manner of reward to be expected, since every creature was made to serve its Creator. Let us not expect here below either rest, or reward, or comforts, or caresses from our Master: let us mind nothing but to do his will, to carry on the work in his field, and to feed his sheep: this is the way to be accounted worthy both of his table and his inheritance in heaven.

“ 8. And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?”

One labour continually succeeds another: but it is not sufficient barely to work, unless we do it for God. We then make ready wherewith our Master may sup, when we ultimately refer to him all the glory of our works; a repast to which he alone has a right. Christ is likewise served, fed, and nourished by us, when we gain over souls to him, which being his fulness, augment and fill his body, and bring it to its perfect age and stature. Happy that

person, who, through his service and fidelity, is deemed worthy to be admitted to the heavenly banquet, and to have God himself for his food and nourishment there.

“ 9. Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him ? I trow not.”

We are more God’s than a slave is his master’s. We do no more than what we ought, when we even spend ourselves in his service, since we have received every thing only from and for him. It is the glory of the creature, to be employed in the works of the Creator; and it is still a new obligation, to receive from him the qualifications which enable us to labour therein. Let us not boast of any thing, since no manner of good proceeds from our own stock, not even so much as a good thought, or a good desire. Our stock is our nothing ; and all our pretensions are built entirely upon the goodness and liberality of our Master.

“ 10. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants : we have done that which was our duty to do.”

There is not a more unprofitable servant in the world, than one who can do nothing unless his master work with him, and do more than he ; who can bring him no profit by his labour ; and cannot do any thing as he ought, and in a manner which is pleasing and acceptable to him. Such is man left to himself ; such is he, who, acting by the spirit of bondage to the law, performs only the external part thereof ; and who is not moved and acted by the Spirit of the adoption of children, which causes them to perform

the commandment upon a principle of love. My God, I acknowledge with joy, that I owe every thing to thy mercy, and that all thy rewards are acts of pure grace; because all our deserts are thy gifts, and it is thou who workest in us all our good works.

SECT. III.—*The ten Lepers. Thanksgiving.*

“ 11. ¶ And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:”

The leprosy of sin renders us unworthy to approach and draw near to God. There is no deadly sin whatever, but carries in it excommunication in respect of God, since it deprives us of God himself. That man, who is sensible of his own unworthiness to draw near to God, is then actually drawing near to him. This sense of our unworthiness is the thing by which our repentance must begin. We know nothing of the nature either of sin, or of true repentance, when we would fain be re-instated immediately in the possession of those advantages which we have lost by sin, and are unwilling to bear the shame and confusion of being separated from them.

“ 13. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

Prayer must be strong and earnest, when the disease is great and inveterate. The gift of prayer, in the beginning of conversion, is a great gift; and it is preserved by prayer itself. The farther we see ourselves from God, the higher must we lift up our voices. All that we have to ask in this condition,

is the mercy of God; and it is of and through Jesus Christ that we must ask it. The double leprosy of ignorance and concupiscence requires a double mercy: a Master to disperse the darkness of the understanding by his light; and a Jesus or Saviour to deliver the heart from its slavery by the infusion of his love. Have mercy on us, O Jesus, our Master and our Saviour!

“ 14. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.”

Respect, love, and submission towards the church, towards the hierarchical order, and the subordinate pastors, are here intimated and recommended to us in the conduct of the Son of God; and he hereby shows to sinners, by what conveyance they are to receive the grace of repentance and reconciliation. So speedy a cure is the reward of so ready an obedience. God would have us submit, before all things, to the ordinary means of salvation; and he never favours the spirit of independency and singularity. It is prudence in the chief pastors of the church, after the example of the sovereign Pastor, to authorize subordinate pastors, and to cause their authority to be acknowledged, even in cases wherein they might act immediately themselves, without the help of their ministration. We ought as much as possible to prevent calumnies, as Jesus Christ here does, by submitting exactly to the laws.

“ 15. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,” .

Acknowledgment for favours and blessings re-

ceived, is so much the more acceptable to God, because it is so rare. A heart which is very grateful, cannot defer testifying its gratitude one moment. The world is full of persons who lift up their voice in the church, to pray for benefits and favours; and who continue dumb when they have once received them. The design of God in conferring them upon us, is to be glorified for them.

“ 16. And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.”

What acknowledgment and gratitude then do those owe to God, whom he has so often cured of an infinite number of sins! This is a thing of which we are the least sensible, whilst we very carefully preserve the remembrance of a temporal blessing, of the cure of any bodily distemper, &c. True gratitude is always accompanied with humility; and this humility is so much the greater, in proportion to the greatness of the evil, and to the sense a man had of his unworthiness to be delivered from it. Let, then, a recovered sinner be always prostrate in mind and heart at the feet of his Deliverer.

“ 17. And Jesus, answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? 18. There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.”

Those who are of the household of faith, are oftentimes more subject to ingratitude than strangers; because they are less sensible of their own unworthiness. It is a great blessing for a man to have always been within the pale of the church, or in the way of piety: but the faults he has committed in that state are the greater, and the pardon received

for them the more valuable. To render to God the glory of his mercies, is to deserve new; to be forgetful of them, is to dry up the fountain from whence they flow.

“ 19. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.”

The lower a penitent prostrates himself at the feet of Christ by a thankful humility, and an humble thankfulness, the higher he lifts him up, and the more he encourages him to walk in his ways. Christ praises the faith of man, to the end, that man may praise the grace of God, which is the principle from which it proceeds, and frequently beg this principle of him. It is faith which gives birth to the life of grace in sinners; it is faith likewise which increases and perfects it in the righteous.

SECT. IV.—*The Kingdom of God within us. The Coming of Christ. The days of Noah and of Lot.*

“ 20. ¶ And when he was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them, and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.”

The kingdom of God does not consist in the pomp or splendour of the world; it is in vain to seek it therein. Every one would willingly find it, without waiting and preparing himself for it: but every one runs the risk of never finding it, who does not live in a constant expectation of it, and in a continual disposition to receive it. Carnal men, big with the conceits of a carnal kingdom, the power, riches, and greatness of which have a visible appearance, are far

from perceiving and owning the kingdom of God, which is established only upon the ruins of that love which they have towards false happiness. The kingdom of grace is visible to none but those who have invisible eyes, and to whom invisible things are all in all.

“ 21. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

It is in the heart of man that the kingdom of God and of his grace is established by obedience and love: and this kingdom was made visible and manifest only by miracles, by the subjection of the devil to the power of Christ, and by the obedience of those who forsook all to follow him in his state of poverty. It is very just that we should not find it, if we will not know it by those marks which he has given us of it in his word. A heart which is humble, meek, charitable, and disengaged from earthly things, will always find it; because they are these very virtues which make the kingdom which it seeks.

“ 22. ¶ And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it.”

We must make good use of the times of grace, peace, indulgence, and light, to prepare ourselves against those of destitution, trouble, temptation, suffering, and darkness. The apostles profited but little by the visible presence and sensible graces of Christ: and had not the Holy Ghost taught them all things anew, and brought all things to their remembrance, what would have become of them in the times of false Christs and of persecutors? Let us

fear these times, in which Christ seems to be withdrawn; and let us establish and strengthen ourselves in his doctrine and love, that we may not have the misfortune to be surprised in our weakness.

“ 23. And they shall say to you, See here! or, see there! go not after them, nor follow them.”

It is not to the bare name of Christ, but to his doctrine and precepts that we must adhere, since there are false Christs and false gospels. Let us not follow him whom men point out to us, but him whom God points out in the Scriptures, and authorizes by miracles. There are false churches as well as false Christs: and the true spouse is known by the same marks with the true Bridegroom. It is enough for a church not to be so ancient as Christ, to make it a false church.

“ 24. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.”

The brightness and quickness with which Christ was made known in the world by the preaching of the gospel, may very justly be compared to lightning. As it is one and the same lightning which shineth from the one part under heaven to the other: so it is the same faith, the same Christ, and the same Christian society; and this universality is one of the properties of the true faith, the true Christ, and the true church. That which is now done successively by faith, will be done in an instant, when the Son of man shall visibly appear to all mankind, in order to judge the world. Now is the day of men, it will be then the day of the Lord.

“ 25. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.”

Suffering and the cross of Christ are the only means chosen by God to form his church, and to fit and prepare her to appear with Christ at the great day. None of his members are excused from walking in this way: they must suffer, and be hated of the world, before they can partake of his glory. And a man may justly be said to be hated and rejected of the world, when he follows those maxims which it hates and rejects, and exposes himself to persecution on that account.

“ 26. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.”

The hour of death and that of judgment are uncertain. That which happened in former ages, is a figure of what will happen in the last times. The use which a Christian ought to make of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, according to the institution of God and the advice of Christ, is therein to study his own duties, and to contemplate Christ and his church. The old world, surprised by the deluge, after a course of preaching and impenitency for a hundred years together, is an emblem of that which happens to the generality of men at the time of death, and of that which will happen at the last day to the whole world.

“ 27. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark; and the flood came, and destroyed them all.”

The life of men in the days of Noah represents to us, in a lively manner, the sottishness and strange

stupidity of worldly men, who are entirely taken up with this present life, and regard not in the least the threats of the divine wrath. It looks as if this life were given to men, to no other end, but only that they might acquire such a share of the good things thereof, as will enable them to pass it at their ease, in the midst of all sorts of conveniences, in abundance, and with splendour; and that they might endeavour to perpetuate their name and family, by advantageous matches. For is not this the thing which takes up the whole care and concern of those whom the world styles people of fashion, and that which generally makes them unhappy reprobates?

“ 28. Likewise also, as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;”

To see the life of the generality of mankind, would one not be apt to imagine, that they were made only to establish themselves upon earth, to eat and drink, and to perform the business of the natural or civil life; and that the world to come did not at all relate to them? They will open their eyes at the time of death; but God grant it may not be to as little purpose as men opened theirs in the days of Noah and of Lot! These two dreadful histories are read with the same indifference with which the Roman history is read; and yet they are types and prophecies of the miserable end of the sinners who read them, if not prevented by a timely repentance.

“ 29. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.”

What can these words and this figure mean, but only that the greatest part of mankind are surprised by death, while some are thinking only of their pleasures, others of their fortune? Let us learn of Lot to despise and forsake every thing, if there be occasion, rather than continue exposed to the wrath of God. Let us lose no time in deliberating: the danger is always great and imminent, when a man is not sure of one moment, and eternity lies at stake. One moment's delay had exposed Lot to inevitable destruction by the fire and brimstone of Sodom: we have infinitely more to fear.

“ 30. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.”

A sudden and universal deluge, and a rain of fire and brimstone, are only types and shadows of the last desolation. “ Even thus shall it be in the day,” &c. are not words spoken at random: they are words of faith, which assure us that the world shall be surprised, that the wrath of God shall pour down upon sinners like a rain, and swallow them up like a deluge, and that a very small number shall escape his justice. A false notion which men frame to themselves of a mercy without rule or measure, encourages the greatest part of the world in the neglect of their salvation. Let us judge of the divine justice by these two examples, since it is to this end that our blessed Lord proposes them to us.

“ 31. In that day, he which shall be upon the house-top, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.”

Let us leave that to perish which must perish: let

us save our immortal part. There is nothing, among all the good things of the world, which deserves that we should hazard our life for it, much less our soul. Life is short, death is at the gate, the hour is uncertain; and at that hour, whatever we love and value in the world will be taken away from us: what folly is it, then, to set our affections upon any thing here below! Let us not be solicitous to change that state and condition wherein God has thought fit to place us; but let us therein, with patience, wait for that state which will never change.

“ 32. Remember Lot’s wife.”

When we have once quitted the world, we must not think any more of it; nor return to our former inclinations, when God has weaned us from them. A man is sometimes so great an enemy to his own good, that he regrets the loss of wicked company, and of those opportunities of ruining himself, from which he has been delivered through the mercy of God. This is a piece of ingratitude which he cannot bear, and which he punishes very severely. We must, even with joy, relinquish our friends and relations, our wealth and temporal advantages, and raze them out of our memory, whenever they become obstacles to our salvation. We love them with a criminal fondness, when we leave them with grief and anxiety.

“ 33. Whosoever shall seek to save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life, shall preserve it.”

Happy is the loss when a man loses himself, full of sins and corrupt inclinations, and subject to death, in order to find himself again innocent, full of charity, immortal and glorious! The love alone of this short

and perishing life, can make us resolve to lose all in order to save it; but we must resolve to lose even this life itself, for the sake of one infinitely better and eternal. Had we but faith, should we not be willing to do more for the life of the soul than for that of the body? But that which we do now is the direct contrary.

“ 34. I tell you, In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.”

Men save and lose their souls in all places, and in all states and conditions. First, In the state which belongs to those who live retired from the noise of the world, or are most closely united together. It is an advantage to be united to holy persons, either by friendship or relation; but if we desire to improve this advantage as we ought, and to be saved with them, we must imitate their example. God can easily discern in all places, and distinguish those who are his. It is in the night of tribulation, persecution, extreme calamity, and death, that this distinction is made. Let us prepare ourselves for it while it is day.

“ 35. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 36. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”

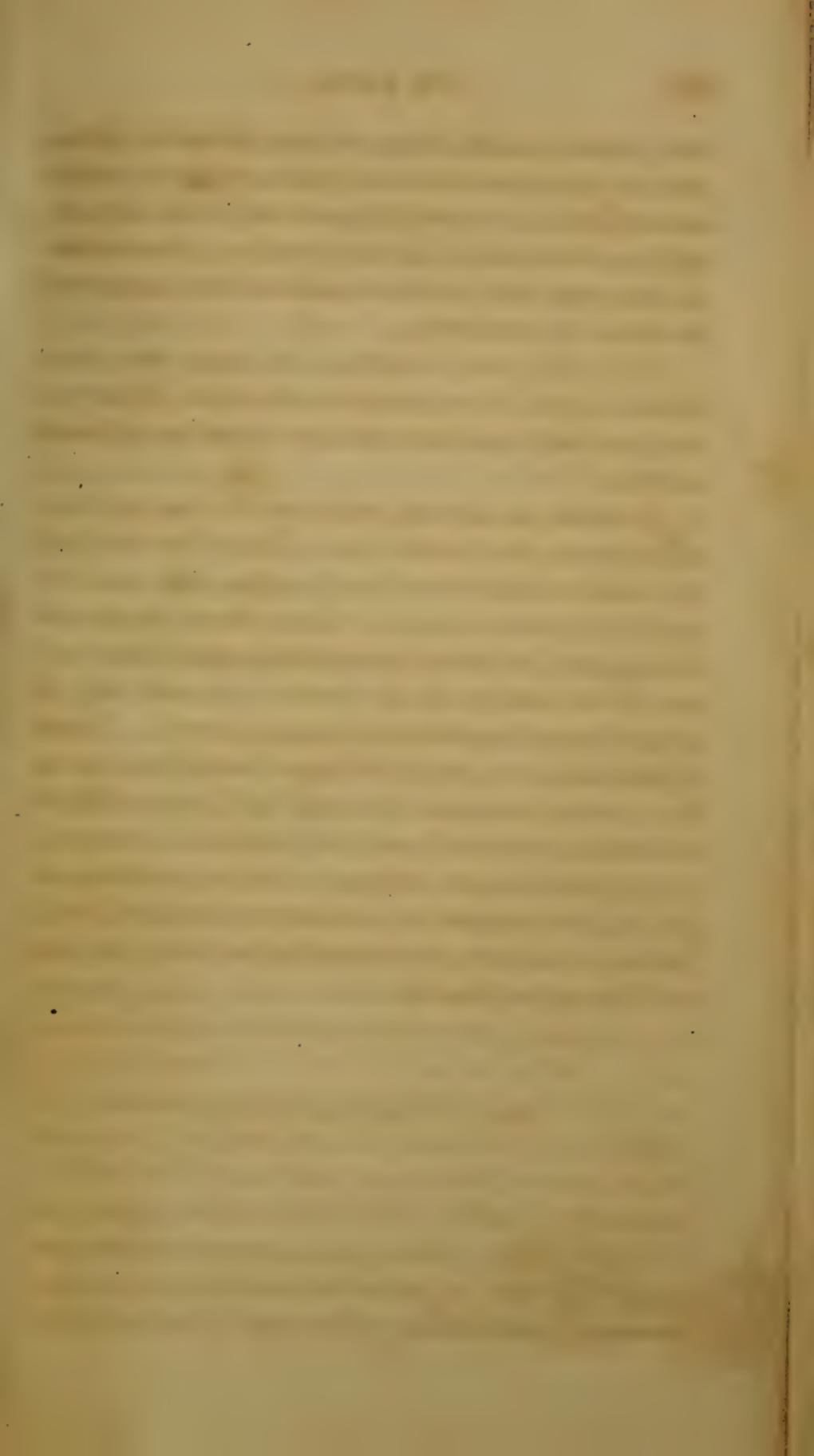
The second state is of such as labour for the necessaries of life, or in troublesome and tumultuous employments; the noise and hurry whereof hinder them from hearing the voice of God, and the warnings of the approaching calamity. The third state is of those, who, being neither in business nor in retirement, lead a free and easy life at their own discre-

tion. God has his elect, and the devil his slaves, who are the reprobate, in all places and in all conditions of life: it is therefore necessary in all, for men to labour and watch, that they may be of the number of those who belong to God, and that they may avoid the snares of the devil.

“ 37. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.”

The elect are the eagles; Christ is their prey and nourishment for eternal life. Happy he who is of the number of these spiritual eagles, who soar towards heaven to seek Jesus Christ there, the eternal Truth, and to fasten unchangeably upon him; and not of the number of the ravens, who seek only to gorge themselves with the things on earth! These eagles and ravens are here below mixed together in the church, which is the body of Christ, diffused throughout the world, and composed of all nations: but in heaven, none but eagles will be gathered together, and re-united in this immortal body, of which Christ is the head, the strength, the food, the joy, and the eternal felicity.

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